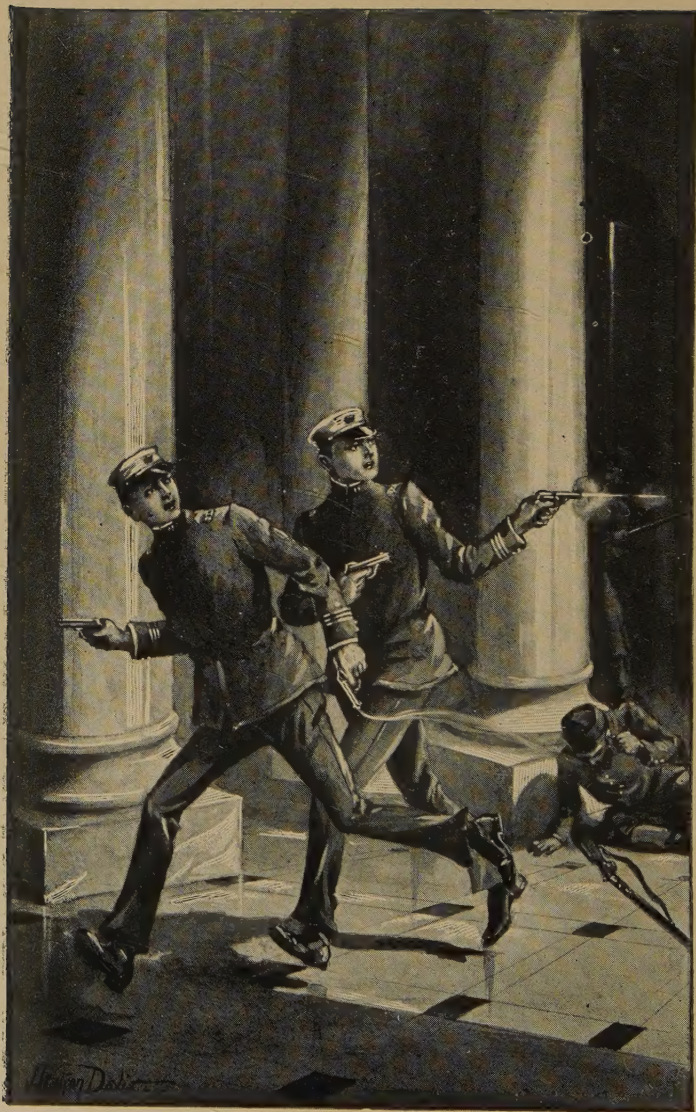


THE BOY ALLIES WITH THE SUBMARINE D32

By ENSIGN ROBERT L. DRAKE



Donald Switzenberg Ph.D.



Both lads raised their revolvers and fired. "Not out the front way," cried Frank as they dashed along. Page 95.

"The Boy Allies with the Submarine D-32"

The Boy Allies
with
The Submarine D-32

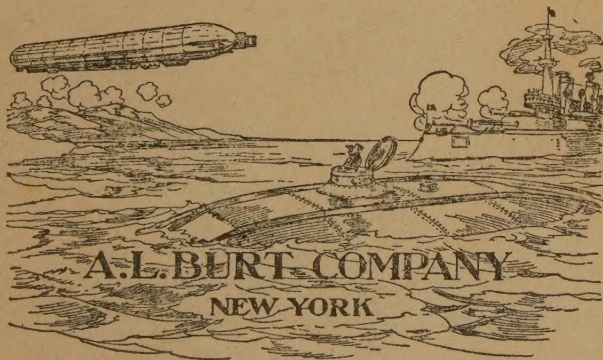
OR

The Fall of the Russian Empire

By Ensign ROBERT L. DRAKE

AUTHOR OF

"The Boy Allies with the Navy Series"



A. L. BURT COMPANY
NEW YORK

The Boy Allies (Registered in the United States Patent Office) **With the Navy Series**

By Ensign ROBERT L. DRAKE

The Boy Allies on the North Sea Patrol
or, Striking the First Blow at the German Fleet.

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THE BOY ALLIES WITH THE SUBMARINE D-32

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CHAPTER I

A PLOT OVERHEARD

THE night was dark and blustery. Rain fell in swirls, and a stiff wind swept the dock toward the western extremity of the French seaport of Calais on the English channel. Three figures, who stood on the pier shortly before midnight, drew their great coats closer about them to protect themselves from the biting cold.

One of these three figures was a sentinel. His duty was to keep an eye out for possible danger. He paced slowly up and down glad that midnight was approaching, for at that hour he would be relieved, after which he would seek the warmth of his quarters.

The other two figures, a close observer would have found, were considerably less in years than was

the sentinel, although the latter was a young man himself. The two figures were garbed in long overcoats, but beneath these they wore the uniforms of the British navy, rank of first lieutenants.

Their ship, of which they were the first and second officers respectively, the cruiser *Norwalk*, stood some distance out in the channel. The two boys had gone ashore the day before with a message from the commander of the *Norwalk* to the French commandant in Calais. Now they were awaiting the approach of a small boat from the cruiser which was to take them back aboard ship.

"I wish it would stop raining," said Lieutenant Jack Templeton, first officer of the *Norwalk*.

"Same here," replied his companion, Frank Chadwick. "You can't see half a dozen yards in the darkness out there."

He swept his arm in the direction of the darkness of the channel.

"I'll be glad to get back aboard and turn in," said Jack. "It's nasty cold."

"Rather early for this sort of weather, too," said Frank. "Wish the boat would get a move on."

The two flapped their arms about to warm their bodies. Directly a squad of men approached the sentinel on the dock. The latter stepped into line

and another took his place. The watch was being changed. The squad of men moved on again.

This new sentinel paid little attention to the two lads. He knew that if they had no business there they would have been taken care of by his predecessor.

Five minutes later three men muffled in great coats appeared on the dock. They passed within a few feet of where Jack and Frank were standing.

"Russian officers," said Frank to his friend as they drew near.

Jack nodded in the darkness but made no audible reply.

The Russians appeared to be engaged in deep conversation, and they paid no attention to the two young officers.

"Then the reign of the czar is about over," said one.

"Yes. He's at the front now. When he returns he'll be acquainted with the fact that he is no longer the ruler of Russia. The Duma —"

Frank and Jack lost the rest of the sentence as the men disappeared in the darkness. Frank grasped his companion by the arm.

"Hear that?" he cried excitedly. "There's something wrong some place. Those fellows gave

me the impression that they knew what they were talking about."

"Same here," said Jack briefly. "We've overheard something that wasn't meant for ears friendly to the allies."

"Let's follow them," said Frank.

"Our boat will be here in a minute," said Jack. "We are due aboard."

"Well, I'll follow them, then," said Frank hurriedly. "You go aboard and report to Lord Hastings. I'll return here as soon as possible."

Jack considered a moment.

"Very well," he said, "but you'll have to hurry to overtake them. Good-by. Be careful. I'll have a boat wait here all day for you, if necessary. Don't —"

Jack became silent for he found that he was talking to space. Frank had disappeared in the wake of the three Russians.

"Hope he doesn't let his hot-headedness run away with him," Jack muttered to himself.

He turned again and scanned the blackness of the channel.

Directly there came to his ears the faint "chug-chug" of an approaching motorboat. A moment later a small shape loomed up in the darkness at the

edge of the dock. It was the launch from the *Norwalk*, come to take Frank and Jack back aboard.

Jack climbed in quickly and the launch put about and made for the cruiser. Fifteen minutes later Jack clambered over the side of the war vessel and made his way at once to the commander's cabin. The latter was in bed, but Jack's knock at the door roused him.

"Come in," he called.

Jack threw open the door and entered. He had divested himself of his overcoat as he went below and he now stood before Lord Hastings, commander of the *Norwalk*, at attention.

"Where's Frank?" were Lord Hastings' first words.

Briefly Jack explained. Lord Hastings listened with interest.

"And so," Jack concluded, "we decided that there was something in the air that we were not supposed to know and that therefore it would be well to find out if we could."

"Perfectly right," said Lord Hastings. "I hope Frank is successful and gets into no trouble. First thing in the morning, I shall get in touch with the admiralty and report. There have been some strange tales coming out of Russia recently. Any-

thing seems to be possible in that country right now. I hope that the czar is in no danger. He hasn't had very smooth sailing the last year, and it is entirely possible that events in the land of the bear are nearing a crisis."

"But surely, sir," said Jack, "the allies will not stand by and see the czar deposed?"

Lord Hastings shrugged his shoulders.

"I doubt if there is much we could do from here," he replied. "Of course, should the czar be overthrown, there is no telling what might happen. Revolution probably would doubtless lead to anarchy. This would lay the country open to invasion by German armies. What result a revolution would have on the Russian soldiers and sailors remains to be seen."

"Surely the army would remain loyal," said Jack.

"You would naturally think so," agreed Lord Hastings, "but it is hard to tell. When a spirit of unrest sweeps a country there is no telling where it will stop."

"But the czar should be warned," declared Jack.

"I've an idea the czar knows what is going on," said Lord Hastings. "If he felt in need of assistance, he probably would have asked it before now.

Trouble is, though, that these things spring up so suddenly a man doesn't have time to prepare. I hope there is no truth in this, but it is well to be prepared. I shall report what you have learned to the admiralty in the morning."

Jack took this to mean that the interview was at an end. He saluted his commander and moved toward the door.

"One moment," said Lord Hastings, as he was about to leave the cabin, "at what hour did Frank say he would return?"

"He didn't say," was Jack's reply. "I told him I'd have a boat waiting for him at the dock all day."

"Good," said Lord Hastings. "By the way, are you sleepy?"

"No, sir; why?"

"I thought not," said Lord Hastings quietly. "You're never sleepy when Frank is in danger. That's why I thought probably you would like to return ashore and watch for him."

Jack nodded eagerly.

"I would be glad to, sir," he replied, "but I didn't want to make the suggestion."

"Very well," said Lord Hastings, "you will go ashore and wait until Frank returns. It may be

that you will be able to lend him a hand. Take the launch and ten men."

Jack saluted and left the cabin. While he hurried on deck to make the necessary arrangements, Lord Hastings composed himself to sleep.

Jack summoned the third officer, who had held the bridge when he came aboard, and explained the nature of the errand that took him ashore again. Then he picked his men, and went over the side.

The little launch made quick time back to the wharf. Jack, again muffled in his great coat, took his position upon the dock in the darkness, prepared to wait there until Frank should return.

"Hope he's not too long," Jack muttered to himself. "It's awfully raw here."

Dawn came and still there was no sign of Frank. Two hours after daylight the watch on the dock was changed again, but still there was no sign of Frank.

Jack became uneasy.

"Hope he hasn't got into trouble," he muttered.

He summoned one of his men from the launch, Black by name.

"I'm going to do a little looking about, Black," he said. "You're in command here until I return. I'll be gone no longer than I can help. Wait for me."

Jack knew that there was little likelihood of his tracing Frank, but he was tired of inaction. He hurried away in the direction Frank had gone more than ten hours before.

CHAPTER II

FRANK ON THE TRAIL

WHEN Frank left Jack's side on the dock he feared for a moment that he had delayed too long and would be unable to overtake the three Russians. The Russians were out of sight as he hurried forward and for perhaps five minutes he went along without catching sight of them.

"By George! If I've lost 'em —" he muttered.

He became suddenly silent. Off to the left he heard voices. One of these he recognized as that of the man who had spoken a short time before. Frank breathed a sigh of relief, slowed down, and taking care to keep as much out of sight as possible, followed.

After perhaps ten minutes more of walking, the Russians turned away from the water front and headed toward the heart of the city itself. Frank was close behind.

Frank was not familiar with the streets of the French city and so, as the Russians led the way first to the right and then to the left, he lost his sense of

direction completely. He realized this fact, but it did not worry him.

"Guess I'll be able to find the way back when the time comes," he muttered as he slunk along.

It seemed to Frank that he had walked for more than an hour when the Russians stopped before a house in a long row of similar dwellings. Quickly they looked around and Frank saved himself from discovery only by slinking close against the wall. Apparently satisfied that they had not been followed, the men mounted the steps and passed within.

Frank, waiting until he felt sure the Russians had moved away from the door, also mounted the steps and quietly turned the knob. The door was locked, even as Frank had expected it would be. The lad descended to the walk and looked around.

To the left of the house he espied a narrow iron fire escape. The ladder lacked perhaps eight feet of reaching the ground, but Frank felt sure that he could reach it by a spring.

Standing squarely under the ladder, he stooped and then jumped in the air. His hands found their mark and for a moment he swung there, swaying to and fro. Then he drew himself up.

Rapidly and quietly, then, Frank mounted the

ladder. At the first platform there was a large window. There was no light from within and Frank tried the window gently. It was locked.

Frank wasted no time there. He mounted to the next platform, where he had better luck. The window was unlocked. It squeaked slightly as Frank raised it high enough to crawl inside. He lowered the window behind him and stood in the darkness of the strange house.

The lad listened intently. No sounds came to his ear.

"Either all dead, asleep or all downstairs," the lad muttered.

From his pocket Frank produced a small search-light. A small though brilliant ray lighted up the spot as he pressed the button and Frank made out that he was in a long hall. To his left were steps, leading down.

"Guess that's the direction I want to go," he muttered.

To think with Frank was to act. He wasted no time in considering the possibilities of his wanderings in this strange house. He advanced to the steps and descended quietly.

At the bottom — which was the second floor — he saw no light, nor could he hear voices. He lis-

tened for the sound of breathing that would proclaim the floor inhabited, though the inhabitants might be asleep. None came.

"Guess I'll go down another flight," the lad told himself.

He flashed his light for a moment that he might not stumble as he took the first step. Then he went down.

All was darkness on the first floor as well. For perhaps a minute Frank stood stock still at the bottom of the steps, listening. There was no sound to indicate where the three Russians might be.

"Well, they came in here," Frank told himself. "They must be here some place."

He flashed his light along the hall. Several rooms were exposed to view, but the doors of these were open, so the lad knew that the Russians were not hidden there. At the far end of the hall Frank saw one closed door. He approached it cautiously.

"Probably leads into the basement," he said, "and if it does, that is most likely where I shall find the Russians."

He moved close to the door and laid his ear against it. From beyond, he caught the faint sound of voices.

"That's where they are, all right," he told himself.

In vain he tried to make out the nature of the conversation beyond the closed door. The voices came plainly to his ear, but what they said was unintelligible.

"I'll have to get closer than this," Frank told himself.

He put his hand on the knob and turned it gently. There was no sound as he opened the door slightly, one hand the while on his automatic in his right-hand coat pocket.

As he expected, the opening of the door disclosed another pair of steps. A faint light was visible at the bottom. Frank considered the situation a moment.

"Can't learn anything up here," he told himself at last. "I'll have to go down."

He descended slowly, testing each step before he bore full weight on it, for he knew that a single squeak and he would betray himself. But the steps gave forth no sound.

At the bottom, Frank battened himself as close as possible against the wall. Toward the front of the house, he could hear the voices of the three Rus-

sians. They were intelligible enough now. Frank listened.

"You say the Duma will arrest the czar when he returns from the battle front," said a voice.

"Yes. Then the Duma will declare its authority and take charge of the government. A new government will be formed, probably a coalition government, with representatives of the people there to look after the interests of the people."

"Then you expect a bloodless revolution?"

"Yes."

"Well, I fear you are doomed to disappointment," said another voice. "Bloodless revolutions are all very well to talk about, but they seldom materialize. You will find that within a week after the czar has been deposed, anarchy will hold sway. The streets of Petrograd and of Moscow and of other cities will run blood. The revolutionists will be fighting among themselves. Out of the revolutionary party will arise many other parties, each determined to rule and as determined to make vassals of the others. Even the army will be affected, and then what?"

"Eventual peace," said the first voice.

"Peace, bah!" was the reply. "German secret

service agents will overrun the country. Within the year, Russia will be a vassal of Germany."

"You don't seem to see things in the right way, Ivan," said the first speaker.

"Maybe I don't see them to your way of thinking, but I see them aright," was the answer; and the man continued: "I've a notion to take what I know to the French authorities, and learn if there is not something the allies can do to avert this calamity."

"Oh, no, you won't, Ivan," said the first speaker. "Let events in Russia shape their course."

There was a long silence, after which the man addressed as Ivan said:

"I guess you're right. There is nothing we can do. As you know, I am no lover of the czar; but it seems too bad that the allies cannot stand together until Germany has been beaten. Time enough then to begin fighting among ourselves. But if the information we have were to come into possession of the British or French authorities, I am not sure what would happen. The czar, of course, would be warned, but I believe that would be too late now to change the course of the Duma."

"I agree with you, Ivan. With this coup to be

sprung within ten days, there is little assistance the allies could give the czar."

"Well, there is no need to discuss it further," said Ivan. "We are still fighting Germany and will continue to fight as long as we may; but what our countrymen will do when the streets run blood is more than I can say. We — what's that?"

From the position where Frank stood listening to the conversation, there was a sudden crash. Frank muttered an imprecation and darted up the stairs.

The sound that had interrupted the Russians' conversation was the dropping of Frank's flashlight.

"Quick, men," said one of the Russians. "We are discovered. Some one is going up the steps!"

With a cry of anger, the three men dashed forward.

CHAPTER III

HIDE AND SEEK

“WHY didn’t I keep hold of that searchlight?” demanded Frank of no one in particular as he ran up the steps.

The lad heard the sound of pursuing footsteps below. At the top he closed the door behind him and felt for a key to lock it. There was no key in the door. Frank dashed for the front door.

This too was locked. In the darkness Frank fumbled for the key. He could not find it. The lad jerked the door angrily, but it would not budge.

Heavy footsteps had almost reached the top of the stairs from the basement now. Frank gave up trying to get out the front door and dashed for the second floor.

As he reached the top, the first Russian emerged from the basement into the hall below.

“He’s still in here!” cried a voice. “Outside, Ivan, and guard the fire escape!”

Frank halted in his tracks at these words, for his plan had been to fling open a window and make his

escape by the way he had entered. The front door downstairs opened and shut. The fire escape was being guarded and Frank knew that it would be dangerous to attempt to descend that way.

"Oh, well," said Frank quietly to himself, "there are only three of them."

But it seemed that three would be enough. Frank realized that the odds were heavily against him. He realized, too, that although the Russians had indicated that they were still enemies of Germany, they would not relish having been spied upon and that it probably would fare badly with him should the Slavs lay hands on him.

Came the footsteps of men ascending the stairs. Frank hit upon a bold plan.

Crouching near the railing, he waited silently as the men came up. Now they were but a few inches from him. Frank could have stretched out a hand and touched the leg of either man.

"Up on the third floor," cried a voice, and not noticing Frank in the darkness, the men dashed for the steps, their flashlights showing the way.

Instantly Frank sprang to his feet and dashed down the steps. The first Russian heard him.

"There he goes!" he shouted, and turned his flashlight full upon Frank.

The second man raised his voice in a shout :

“ Guard the door.”

This order, Frank knew, was meant for the man without, who also was guarding the fire escape.

Came a shot in the darkness and Frank felt something whiz by his ear.

“ No time to loiter here,” he told himself, and turned his footsteps toward the basement.

At the bottom of the steps he stopped and drew his revolver. As the first Russian stepped into the doorway above, Frank fired.

He did not intend to hit the man, rather to warn him away and in this he was successful. The bullet clipped a splinter from the door near the man's head and the Russian drew back.

If there was one thing in which Frank was exceedingly proficient, it was in the use of firearms. He was a crack shot, as he had proved on more than one occasion.

Frank raised his voice.

“ The first man that starts down here dies,” he said quietly.

The Russians kept out of range.

“ Who are you and what do you want here? ” one of them called.

“ None of your business,” said Frank quietly.

The Russian on the outside was now called in and the three held a consultation. The situation now was at a deadlock as Frank and the Russians all knew. The Russians could not descend without imminent risk of being killed, and Frank could not ascend for the same reason.

The situation was unchanged when it grew light a short time later.

Frank turned the situation over in his mind.

"I can't stay here all day," he muttered. "I've got to get out some way. The question is, how?"

Now that the basement was lighted somewhat by sun rays which streamed through a window at the end, Frank walked in that direction. He hesitated a moment to leave his post at the foot of the stairs, for there was the possibility that one of the Russians might descend while he investigated the window.

But the lad had no other plan and for that reason he determined to take a chance. First, however, he decided upon a parley with the Russians above to throw them off their guard. He hailed them.

"What do you want?" demanded one.

"I want to see if we can't come to some agreement whereby we may all go away from here," said Frank.

"Give yourself up then," said the Russian.

"Not much," replied Frank.

"We'll just play a waiting game then," said the Russian.

"Suits me," declared Frank. "Guess I can stick it out as long as you can."

"Oh, no, you can't," was the reply. "There are three of us. We can watch by turns. You will drop exhausted before long."

Frank recognized the value of this reasoning.

"You'll have a long wait, though," he said.

"Perhaps," said the Russian. "However, we're perfectly willing to wait. We've nothing else to do."

Frank judged this a good time to investigate the chances of escape through the window. He kept his revolver ready as he walked across the room, and kept his eyes over his shoulder. Once at the window, he saw why the Russians had not taken the trouble to guard against the possibility of his escape there. The window was barred.

"Pretty tough," was Frank's only comment.

Nevertheless he decided to open the window and test the bars. He raised the sash quietly, so as not to tell the Russians what he was doing. Then he grasped one of the bars and wrenched.

It is probable that Frank was never more surprised than at the result.

The bar came away in his hand and the lad fell back to the floor. He was up in a minute, though, revolver in hand, eyes facing the steps, for he did not know at what moment one of the Russians might venture below. But no Russian head showed itself.

Frank turned again to the window.

"Now what do you think of that?" he muttered. "I guess I can squeeze through there, all right. Now if they'll just let me alone for two minutes."

It took no effort for the lad to climb into the window. Still grasping his revolver, he pushed his right leg through the opening made by the broken bar. In this manner, he was still able to cover the interior of the basement.

He was just about to draw his left leg after the right, when a Russian head suddenly appeared. Without taking aim, Frank fired. The Russian head ducked back, but Frank knew that his escape had been discovered.

"It's up to me to hurry," he told himself.

Quickly now he emerged from the window upon the sidewalk. At the same moment he heard the front door open. Frank took to his heels.

"Safe, I guess!" he said aloud.

But he had spoken too quickly. Just as he was about to turn a corner that would have put him out of range of the Russians as they rushed from the house, there was a revolver shot from behind. Frank felt something sting his left leg, and just as he would have turned the corner out of range, his leg gave way and he went down in a heap.

His revolver was sent spinning from his hand, and he was at the mercy of his opponents. He tried to crawl after his revolver, but it was no use. The Russians were upon him.

"Seize him, Ivan!" cried one of the three men as they approached at a run.

The other man made no objection. He stooped over and picked Frank up in his arms as though he had been a child. In vain Frank clawed at the man's face with his fingers and kicked out with his feet. In Ivan's powerful grip he could do nothing.

The street at this moment was deserted. There was not a soul in sight, save one tall figure coming toward them quite a distance away.

"Quick, Ivan! Back to the house with him," exclaimed the Russian who appeared to be the leader.

Ivan turned his steps in that direction.

The pain in Frank's leg became so great that he

closed his eyes. For that reason he did not recognize the tall figure coming toward him.

Ivan, with Frank in his arms, had now reached the house and was about to carry Frank up the steps, when he was halted by a sharp voice — a voice so sharp that Ivan's companions turned and Frank opened his eyes.

“Put him down!” exclaimed a voice that Frank hailed with a cry of delight.

There, not ten feet away, with two revolvers held steadily before him, was Jack Templeton.

The Russians, covered though they were, hesitated.

“Put him down!” said Jack again, very quietly.

CHAPTER IV

ABOARD THE NORWALK

THE man called Ivan lowered Frank to the ground. Then he turned to Jack.

"This is none of your affair, so you'd better keep out," he said.

"I'm making it my affair," replied Jack. "I'm a British officer and I won't stand by and see any man treated like this."

"I'm a Russian officer, as are my friends here," was the reply, "and we are accountable to no Britisher for what we do."

"You're accountable right now," said Jack with a smile, and emphasized his remark with a wave of his revolvers. He stepped to Frank's side: "How do you feel, Frank?" he asked, being careful to keep the Russians covered in the meantime.

"Well, I feel all right," replied Frank, raising himself to his elbow.

"Can you walk?"

"Don't think so, but I can try."

Frank dragged himself to his feet and gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Not so bad as I thought," he said. "Guess I can hobble along all right, if you'll let me lean on you."

Jack hesitated.

"But how about our friends here?" he questioned, indicating the Russians with a sweeping gesture.

"You pass me the guns and I'll answer for them," said Frank. "You do the walking and steer me along. I'll guarantee they won't bother us much."

"All right," said Jack, and passed Frank one revolver while he covered the Russians with the other. Frank turned the revolver on the now quiet trio, then took the second from Jack.

"Now," he said to the Russians, "you will walk up here and turn your weapons over to me."

The Russians hesitated. Frank leveled one of his weapons so that the muzzle pointed squarely between Ivan's eyes.

"Step lively!" he said.

One after another the Russians threw their weapons at Frank's feet.

"Very good," said the lad then. "Now you'll climb those steps and stand there until we are out of

sight; and even then I'll have my eyes open, so if you try any tricks you'll find that I'm about the handiest officer with a gun you ever saw. March!"

Without a word the three Russians mounted the steps and stood in the small vestibule. Jack picked up the discarded revolvers and stowed them safely in his pockets. Frank put one arm around his friend's shoulder, but kept the other hand free. He clutched his revolver firmly.

"All right, Jack," he said.

They moved off down the street, Frank, over his shoulder keeping an eye on the Russians; and so they turned the corner.

"Into this doorway, quick, Jack!" cried Frank.

Jack didn't know quite what to make of this, but he didn't stop to ask questions. He half carried Frank into the doorway.

Half a minute later the three Russians darted by.

"I thought so," said Frank. "They're desperate characters, all right. A few moments ago they were harmless enough, but now that they have been discovered they'll risk a lot to get rid of us."

At that moment a closed cab passed. Jack hailed the driver and the man pulled up at the curb.

"Want a couple of passengers?" asked Jack.

The driver nodded.

Jack, glancing in the direction of the Russians, saw the men hurrying back. Quickly he dragged Frank across the walk and lifted him into the cab.

"Get away from here, quick!" he shouted to the driver and sprang in after Frank.

The cab went forward with a lurch. At the same moment there were three shots from behind. But the cab did not stop.

"Thought we'd relieved them of all their guns," said Jack.

"So did I," agreed Frank. "They must have waited long enough to re-arm before they started after us. Well, I guess we're safe enough now."

Ten minutes later the driver pulled up and threw open the door.

"Where to, sir?" he asked.

Jack gave the position of the dock and they were soon headed in that direction.

"How did you happen to find me, Jack?" asked Frank as they rode along.

"Pure luck," was Jack's reply. "I'd been waiting on the dock since long before daylight. When you hadn't returned at 8 o'clock, I came to the conclusion that you were in trouble. I didn't figure there was much chance of my finding you, but I took a chance."

"While I was prowling about, I heard a muffled shot. I couldn't make out exactly where it came from, but it made me hunt that much more carefully, for I had an idea that you might be mixed up in the shooting. I was several blocks away when I heard more shots, louder than the others. I placed these without much trouble, and when I saw three men bearing another, I concluded that I was upon the right track.

"Of course, from where I was I couldn't be sure that the wounded man was you, but I wasn't passing up anything. I approached, as you saw, and recognized you before I acted. That's about all there is to it."

"It's a good thing you happened along," declared Frank. "I don't know what they would have done with me if they had got me back in that house."

"You talk as though you had learned something," said Jack.

"So I have. Enough to know that trouble is brewing in the land of the czar."

"Explain."

Frank did so.

"Great Scott!" cried Jack. "This is indeed serious. I repeated the conversation you overheard last night to Lord Hastings, and I guess he has

reported it to the admiralty before now. It strikes me that prompt action is necessary."

"I agree with you, Jack; and yet I don't see that there is much we can do."

"The czar must be warned."

"Of course, if it is possible to get word to him."

"There must be some way," declared Jack.

At this juncture the cab drew up on the dock and the driver dismounted and again threw open the door.

"Here you are, sir," he said.

Jack alighted and lent Frank a hand. He paid the driver, adding a tip so liberal that the man also lent Frank a hand as they moved toward the *Norwalk's* launch, which floated close by.

"Up here, Black, and help Mr. Chadwick in the boat," ordered Jack of the man he had left in charge during his absence.

Though Frank's leg still pained him, he was soon seated comfortably in the launch. A moment later it put off for the *Norwalk*.

Lord Hastings stood near the rail when Frank was carried on deck. He approached quickly and himself led Frank to his cabin. There he summoned the ship surgeon. He would not permit Frank to talk until his wound had been examined.

"Nothing serious, sir," reported the surgeon. "Bullet's still in there though and I shall have to probe for it."

"Go ahead, Doc," said Frank. "The sooner you get it out the sooner I'll be able to walk again."

Frank gritted his teeth as the surgeon opened his case and drew out several shiny, evil looking instruments; and he made no sound as the surgeon probed for the bullet, found it and extracted it. Then his wound was bound up and he was made comfortable in the bunk.

"Now," said Lord Hastings, "you may tell me what you have learned."

Frank did so as briefly as possible. When he had concluded, Lord Hastings said:

"I have already been in touch with the admiralty on the strength of the tale Jack told me last night. I was instructed to furnish confirmation at the earliest possible moment. I was told that the admiralty would take no cognizance of the tale until there was something to support it. I believe you have told me enough. Surely the admiralty will act now."

"I hope so, sir," said Frank, "although I don't see that there is much that can be done."

Lord Hastings made his way to the wireless room, where he again was soon in touch with the admi-

ralty. Half an hour later he was back at Frank's side.

"What luck, sir?" asked Frank eagerly.

"Don't know yet," replied Lord Hastings with a shrug. "I reported in detail and was told that the matter would be given the attention of the ministry this afternoon. Suppose we will know more about it before night."

Lord Hastings was right. At the meeting of the cabinet that afternoon the Russian situation was gone into in detail. The chief lord of the admiralty advanced the opinion that, with trouble threatening in Russia, the Germans undoubtedly would strike a blow at the Russian fleet in the Baltic.

"Success for the enemy in the Gulf of Riga," he said, "together with internal troubles in Russia, is likely to mean Russia's withdrawal from the war. I suggest that we send a submarine fleet to aid the Russians."

So it was decided, though not without opposition; and so it was Jack Templeton and Frank Chadwick who, in the main, were responsible for saving the bulk of the Russian fleet when it encountered the German squadron several weeks later.

CHAPTER V

OFF FOR THE BALTIC

RUMORS of dissension in Russia had been rife for months. Ever since the Russians had suffered a serious reverse at Lemberg in the early stages of the great war, conditions in Russia, from time to time, had been ominous. True, Russia had rallied after this defeat and for a short time had led the world to believe that she had become her old self. But this resurrection had been short lived.

Ever and anon there reached the allied capital reports that Russia was on her last legs and soon would sue for a separate peace. These reports, given little credence at first, appeared more authentic with each succeeding one, so that the matter of Russia became a sore spot in the allies' plans for pushing the war to a successful conclusion.

Where before, diplomats had counted upon Russia's doing her share in the war, preparations now were being made to continue the struggle should Russia shatter the triple entente.

Reports of disturbances in Russia were kept as

secret as possible, for British, French, Italian and American general staffs did not wish to discourage the people, particularly as the war was being prosecuted successfully upon all other fronts. However, news that a plot to overthrow the czar was even now on foot did not reach Great Britain altogether in the nature of a surprise.

Plainly, should the revolutionists succeed in overthrowing the czar, the German general staff would consider it an auspicious moment for launching a grand offensive on the eastern front in an effort to overrun the country and bring Russia to her knees. The fact that a revolution was even now in the making, naturally would be taken by the Germans as an indication that the Russian people were tired of the war and, could they be impressed with the fact that the German armies were still victorious, would be willing to declare peace.

The trouble with this reasoning was that the Germans seemed to have lost sight of the fact that there was war among the various factions that comprised the Russian people. If one faction wanted war, the other wanted peace and vice versa.

The party that was now termed the revolutionists had decided upon the overthrow of the czar because high officials professed to see in the failure of the

Russian armies thus far a plot to turn the country over to Germany. It was said that the German wife of Czar Nicholas had brought such influence to bear, that the czar himself was wavering. It was the professed aim of the Revolutionist party to continue the war more vigorously.

The revolutionists had gained the ascendancy in the Duma, the governing body of Russia. This body, whose duties were practically the same as the American Congress, now had the bit in its teeth and was determined to make of Russia one of the greatest republics in the world. Plans had been laid carefully. An auspicious moment was awaited at which to strike.

This moment was rapidly drawing near.

It was in this situation that Great Britain and France decided to take a hand before it was too late. It was not the sentiment of the allies to oppose a republic of Russia if the people wanted a republic, but it was the aim of the allies to make sure that Russia, monarchy or republic, did not pull out of the war and leave the allies in the lurch.

So it was decided to send a submarine fleet into the Baltic to aid the Russians should the enemy strike there.

The sending of such a fleet meant danger. To

reach the Baltic from the North Sea, it meant that each submarine would have to make a long, circuitous voyage through the Cattegat or to force a passage of the Kiel canal—the narrow strip of water which divides Germany from Denmark—clear the mine fields and run the gauntlet of German battleships and land batteries. It was a nervy undertaking.

Yet such a feat had been accomplished many times before and since the great war began. Many British submarines had run the Kiel canal safely enough. True, many had been lost in the venture, but by far the greater number had made the passage.

On these occasions, however, the venture had been undertaken in isolated cases. There had been no effort to transport a fleet of any size into the Baltic. Such times as the British had gone through, it had been a vessel or two at a time.

Now, however, Great Britain realized the need of taking desperate chances if Russia was to be saved from the clutches of Kaiser Wilhelm and German Prussianism. A British submarine fleet would be of incalculable value to the Russian armada should the kaiser decide the time for attack was propitious.

So the order was given.

Frank Chadwick and Jack Templeton, who had

appraised the British admiralty of the plot to overthrow the czar, and who were second and first officers of H.M.S. cruiser *Norwalk*, were among the youngest officers in the British fleet. Frank was an American lad, but Jack was a Briton.

Frank had been in Naples, Italy, when war was first declared. There he had been shanghaied aboard a sailing vessel where, after some adventures, he had been helped to escape by Jack Templeton when the schooner put into a port on the north coast of Africa for supplies. The boys had become fast friends. Later they had been of assistance to Lord Hastings, now their commander, but who, at that time, had been connected with the British diplomatic service. Lord Hastings had taken a fancy to them, and later, when he was put in command of a ship, he took the boys with him as midshipmen. For valorous service, they had risen to the rank of lieutenants.

Frank now was perhaps 19 years old. Jack was about the same. Jack was huge of stature and as strong as an ox. Frank, on the other hand, was considerably smaller than his friend but what he lacked in strength he made up in proficiency with fire arms.

More than once the lads had been in ticklish situa-

tions and had faced death singly and together. Their resourcefulness was great — their courage even greater.

The lads had seen active service in many parts of the world since they joined the British navy. They had fought in the North Sea, in the Adriatic, in the Baltic and the Mediterranean. They had pursued German raiders through the Indian Ocean, through the Pacific and through the Atlantic. They had served under the Italian and French as well as the British flag.

Only recently they had fought beneath the stars and stripes.

A few short weeks before, aboard an American merchant ship, they had been wrecked and cast upon an island off the coast of South America. There, though to all intent out of the zone of actual fighting, they had destroyed a German submarine base that warships of the allied powers for months had sought in vain to discover.

In this work the lads had had the assistance of a band of pirates. The leader of the pirate band, "Captain Jack," after the lads had brought him to see the evils of his ways in his war upon his own country — "Captain Jack" was an American — had rendered invaluable assistance and for his ef-

forts to aid his country had laid down his life. He himself had led the party that destroyed the submarine base, the submarines in the harbor and the German crews.

An American cruiser, informed by wireless that the raid was soon to be pulled off, headed for the island to take part in the destruction of the submarine base, but had arrived too late. Nevertheless, it had arrived soon enough to pick up the pirates, Frank and Jack and the body of Captain Jack. Then the vessel returned to New York, where word of the raid was given out in such manner as to thrill the nation.

The pirates, in spite of the fact that they had made destruction of the submarine base possible, had been taken in charge by the American authorities and brought to trial for acts of piracy. Jack and Frank had interceded for them with the result that they got off with light sentences.

The body of "Captain Jack" was taken to the home of his parents in the Middle West, where he was buried as a hero. That Captain Jack had been a pirate, his mother, his father nor his friends never knew.

Jack and Frank attended the funeral. Then they

returned to New York, where they placed themselves at the disposal of the American naval authorities. A week later, they were assigned to an American cruiser which was to act as convoy for the transportation of United States soldiers abroad. Once in England, they were released from duty and made their way to London, where they joined Lord Hastings at his home.

There the lads had remained inactive for a week. Then Lord Hastings had been assigned to the *Norwalk* and Jack and Frank had gone aboard with him. For two weeks they patrolled the North Sea in search of German submarines. One day they had put into Calais. It was then that the events transpired that open this story.

When it was announced that the British government had decided to send a submarine fleet into the Baltic, Lord Hastings applied for and received command of one of these underwater craft. Thus it was, a week after this story opens, Frank and Jack found themselves aboard the "D-32" headed across the North Sea for the Kiel canal.

As the two lads stood upon the deck one evening, Frank said:

"Well, here we go again. We've been through

the Kiel canal before and have returned safely. Let's hope we'll be as lucky this trip."

Jack nodded his head slowly.

"Let's hope," he said.

CHAPTER VI

INTO THE GULF OF RIGA

UNLIKE previous trips through the Kiel canal, the present voyage was made without untoward incident. The "D-32" submerged long before she came to the entrance to the canal, and running beneath the water under Lord Hastings's own hand, passed quietly through the canal. The British commander shaped his course by a chart which he had spread before him every moment of the passage.

The venture was undertaken at night, so when Lord Hastings gave the command to come to the surface again it was well after daybreak. A moment after the little submarine poked its head above the water, Lord Hastings, Frank and Jack went on deck. There was no other vessel in sight, but as they looked across the water there was a disturbance in the water to port and suddenly a second submarine popped upon the surface. From time to time other submersibles showed themselves, until at last all except one had been accounted for.

The commanders of the various vessels conferred

by wireless and it was decided to wait for two hours in the hope that the missing vessel would appear. But two hours passed without sighting the vessel.

"There is no use waiting longer," said Lord Hastings to Jack. "The 'D-43' probably will never come to the surface again."

"Wonder what could have happened to her, sir?" asked Jack.

"Hard to tell," returned his commander. "May have gone off her course and struck a mine, engines may be out of commission or she may have encountered one of the enemy. At all events, she's gone."

Again the commanders of the British submarine consulted by wireless, and after a few moments the ships headed east at half speed, all ready to submerge upon an instant's warning.

"German battle fleet probably around here some place," said Lord Hastings. "We'll have to be careful."

But the voyage was uneventful and before the following morning the British submarine fleet entered the Gulf of Riga, where a large, though not very powerful, Russian fleet was anchored. Apparently the Russian commander had had word of their coming, for there was no surprise when the Russian

officers and crews made out that the submarines were British.

Early the following morning the Russian commander and Lord Hastings, as ranking officer of the submarine fleet, exchanged the usual visits of courtesies. Lord Hastings went at length into the internal conditions in the Russian empire with the Russian admiral. The latter professed surprise at the news of impending trouble Lord Hastings carried.

"You need have no fear that the Russian fleet will not prove loyal," he said. "We will give a good account of ourselves when the time comes, you will find."

"I am sure of that, sir," replied Lord Hastings. "But I was wondering whether it would not be well to dispatch a courier to Petrograd to warn the czar, if possible."

The Russian commander considered this some moments before replying.

"It will at least do no harm," he said at last, "though I cannot tell you how the czar is to be warned. I know he is at the front some place, but I have no means of learning just where."

"A courier in Petrograd might have better luck," said Lord Hastings.

"True," said the Russian. "I shall dispatch a courier this morning."

"It might be well," said Lord Hastings, "if the officer who overheard this plot accompanied your courier. He is known personally to his majesty, who has great confidence in him."

"A good idea, your excellency," said the Russian admiral. "Who is this officer?"

"Lieutenant Chadwick, sir, the second officer aboard my vessel. He and Lieutenant Templeton, my first officer, both played a part in gaining this information."

"Then it might be well to send them both," said the Russian. "Can you spare them?"

"Why, I think so," returned Lord Hastings. "I anticipate no battle here immediately. I believe the Germans, who naturally have been appraised of conditions in Russia, will await the outcome of the trouble before striking here."

"Good reasoning, sir. Then will you send these officers aboard my flagship at noon?"

"It shall be done, sir."

The two men saluted and Lord Hastings went over the side of the flagship and was rowed back to the "D-32." There he summoned Jack and Frank and acquainted them with the work ahead.

Needless to say, both boys were glad of the opportunity.

"It will feel good to stretch our legs ashore, sir," said Frank.

"Don't stretch them too far," said Lord Hastings dryly. "You will perhaps remember that the last time you were in Russia you almost failed to get out."

"We'll be careful, sir," Jack promised.

"Very well. You will place yourself at Admiral Darwiski's disposal. You will report to him aboard the flagship at noon. Now you'd better prepare yourselves for the journey."

The lads hastened to their cabin and made the necessary preparations, and promptly at noon they boarded the flagship and presented themselves to the Russian admiral. The admiral greeted them quietly and then summoned a man, attired in the uniform of lieutenant. This man he presented as Lieutenant Strogof.

"You will accompany Lieutenant Strogof to Petrograd, sirs," said the admiral. "I have no doubt the czar will be glad to hear what you have to tell. Lieutenant, you will report to me again as soon as possible, and you may tell his majesty that he may count upon the loyalty of the fleet."

The Russian and the two lads saluted. Half an hour later found them in Riga, where they would take train to Petrograd. The distance to the Russian capital is 325 miles and, with luck, they hoped to be there the following morning.

Neither Jack nor Frank was very familiar with the Russian language, but they found to their satisfaction that the Russian lieutenant spoke French fluently, so they got along famously.

All during the night's ride, the Russian plied them with questions as to how they had gained their information. These questions they answered readily enough.

"It would appear, then," said the Russian, "that this uprising is more widespread than one would imagine."

"It seems to be widespread enough," Frank agreed. "Trouble is, it may affect the army and navy. That would mean the loss of Russia as an ally in the war, and would make the battle all the harder for the others."

"It might not mean that," said Lieutenant Strogof. "Under the proper sort of government, Russia might do more than ever to help her allies."

Jack looked at the man sharply.

"Don't misunderstand me," said the Russian

with a smile. "However, I suppose that even in far-away England you have heard that the hands of the czar are somewhat tied by the machinations of his wife, who is a German. Is it not possible that if the czar would abdicate the war might be prosecuted more vigorously?"

Jack smiled.

"Such talk in some quarters," he said, "might prove your death warrant; and yet, I have had the same feeling. The trouble is that with revolt and riot rampant in Petrograd and through the country, the army might be split into factions. Then what would happen?"

"That's true enough," said Lieutenant Strogof, "and yet if the Duma should take charge, resolved upon a more vigorous war against the foe, and the army remained loyal and steadfast, wouldn't that help?"

"It might," said Frank. "It's worth considering, anyhow."

"Trouble is that the czar might object to giving up his job," said Jack.

"I don't believe I would if I were the czar," said Frank. "It's too much of a job for me."

"I believe that the czar would abdicate willingly if he were sure it was for the good of the country,"

said Lieutenant Strogof. "Understand, it is not his majesty to whom the people are opposed, but rather to the intriguing of men and women in official life who are of German sympathies."

"It may be," said Jack, "that we are crying before we are hurt."

"That's better than getting hurt," declared Frank.

The conversation ceased and the three closed their eyes in an effort to get a little sleep before they reached their journey's end.

It was after 8 o'clock when the train pulled into Petrograd.

"The thing we want to find out," said Lieutenant Strogof as they alighted, "is where we can find the czar; and I've an idea that it won't take long."

He entered a public telephone booth and called a number. Directly he returned to the two lads.

"Our trip's not ended yet," he said. "The czar is still at the front, but he will be in Moscow tomorrow morning. It will be well for us to be there, too."

So that night again Jack and Frank found themselves aboard a train.

CHAPTER VII

CZAR NICHOLAS

It was more than a year now since Jack and Frank had been in Moscow, but the streets were as familiar to them as though it had been yesterday. The hour was after 9 when they reached the city and Lieutenant Strogof led the way to the palace.

"The czar may not have reached here yet," said Frank, as they went along.

"He has, though," said Lieutenant Strogof. "See the flag flying from the palace?"

"Right you are," agreed Jack. "No more evidence is needed to tell us the czar is in the city. What will be our next step, lieutenant?"

"We'll have word sent to the czar that we come from Admiral Darwiski. Fortunately, I carry a letter that will insure us *entre*. I've no doubt the czar will receive us at once."

And so it proved. Lieutenant Strogof presented his letter to a man who stopped them at the palace gates. That worthy disappeared in some haste, and

returning a few moments later, motioned the three to follow him.

"His majesty will see you at once," he said.

Frank, Jack and the Russian lieutenant a few moments later found themselves in a small ante-chamber. From beyond, they caught the sound of voices. One of these was the voice of the czar.

Perhaps five minutes later a door opened and Czar Nicholas, whom fate had decreed was to be the last of the ruling Romanoffs, appeared, flanked on either side by several officers in handsome and imposing uniforms of many colors, trimmed in gold and lace.

"The courier from Admiral Darwiski," said Czar Nicholas sharply.

Lieutenant Strogof stepped forward and bent low.

"The admiral informs me," said the czar, "that you have important information for me."

"We have, your majesty," was the lieutenant's reply, "but it would be well if it were not divulged in the presence of others."

Czar Nicholas glanced around sharply. His eyes rested upon Jack and Frank. He gazed at them curiously for a few moments, then the light of

recognition dawned in his eyes. He stepped forward quickly.

"Surely," he exclaimed, "I cannot be mistaken. You are the companions of my old friend Lord Hastings. You are —"

He looked at Jack and paused.

"Lieutenant Templeton, your majesty," said Jack, bowing low.

"Of course," said the czar. "I knew I had made no mistake. And your friend here," he looked at Frank and hesitated again. It was plain that the czar had not much of a memory for names.

"Lieutenant Chadwick, your majesty," said Frank, also bowing.

"Of course," said the czar again. "And may I ask what brings you here?"

"We come with Lieutenant Strogof here," said Frank, indicating the Russian lieutenant.

"So?" exclaimed the czar, raising his eyebrows a trifle. "Then you perhaps know something of the information he carries?"

"Yes, your majesty," replied Jack. "My friend here was so fortunate as to be the one to learn it."

Czar Nicholas turned to the members of his retinue.

"You will kindly withdraw, gentlemen," he said quietly.

The gaily bedecked officers bowed and departed. When they had disappeared into an adjoining room, Czar Nicholas addressed Lieutenant Strogof.

"You may speak now, sir," he said.

"Your majesty," said the lieutenant, "I am instructed to inform you that there is a plot to seize you the moment you set foot in Petrograd."

The czar staggered back.

"What!" he exclaimed.

"It is true, sir," continued the lieutenant, "and the plot is widespread. It has been hatched by the Duma, sire."

"Impossible," declared the czar, and turned to Frank. "You say you are the one who learned this information," he said. "Tell me about it."

As briefly as possible Frank related what he had learned in the French city of Calais. As he talked the czar paced up and down nervously.

"It can't be true," he exclaimed when Frank became silent. He clapped his hands together. "I'll go to Petrograd at once!" he exclaimed. "I'll arrest or dissolve the Duma and form a new one. I'll nip this plot in the bud!"

"I am afraid, sire," said Jack quietly, "that it is too late."

Czar Nicholas wheeled upon him.

"It is never too late!" he thundered. "Do you think I shall sit still while my throne is taken away from me? Am I to be trifled with by my servants? I shall place myself at the head of my troops in the capital and take possession of the Duma."

"Even the army is affected, sire," said Jack.

Czar Nicholas gesticulated violently and sputtered angrily. Then he said:

"How do you know that?"

"The same way we know the rest of the trouble, your majesty," said Frank. "The army has swung over to the Duma. Only your return to Petrograd is awaited to make you a prisoner."

Czar Nicholas became suddenly calm.

"And can you tell me why?" he asked.

"The men who have decided that you must be removed, sire," said Frank, "are of the opinion that they can prosecute the war more vigorously and successfully than you have done. They claim to see in the repeated defeats and troubles of the Russian troops the hand of the German kaiser. They claim to see the influence of a German queen of Russia, sire."

"What!" thundered the czar. "Do they believe me a traitor to my own people?"

"Not that, sire," Jack hastened to assure the czar. "Rather they see the results of the activities of German agents in the Russian empire — agents who, through protection afforded by men of German sympathies high in Russian official life, have been permitted to spread dissension and discontent throughout the land. Leaders in the Duma believe that, once the ruling family has been safely disposed of, Russia will renew the war with redoubled vigor."

"I see," said the czar. "Now let me ask you something. Do you not know that you have done a bold thing in telling me these things to my face? I could have you shot."

Jack and Frank both shrugged their shoulders, but it was Jack who replied:

"We are here under orders, sire. We have faced death too often to turn our backs on it now."

The czar brought his hands together violently, and a smile broke over his face.

"You are brave youngsters," he said, "as I have occasion to know. I have complimented Lord Hastings before now upon being blessed with such

subordinates. I shall increase those compliments if I am ever permitted to see his lordship again. But tell me now. What is it the Duma desires me to do?"

"Abdicate, I should say, sire," replied Jack quietly.

"Abdicate!" echoed the czar, and stopped stock still.

"I do not know that positively, sire," said Jack, "but such is my idea."

"And mine, your majesty," declared Frank, with a nod of his head.

"Abdicate!" said the czar again. "Abdicate and turn my country over to the terrorists? No. They don't know Czar Nicholas. When I return to Petrograd it shall not be to poke my head into the lion's mouth. Rather will I go as the lion. Naturally, the Duma believes that I have not been warned, but unhappily for the plans of the conspirators I have. And forewarned is forearmed. The Duma shall pay the penalty for this treason."

The czar raised his voice and called for his retinue. A moment later his officers flocked into the room and gathered about him. Frank, Jack and Lieutenant Strogof fell back as the czar, plainly very much

excited, informed his friends in a loud voice of the reception that awaited them upon their return to Petrograd.

"But," said the czar, "we shall leave for Petrograd this very moment. Order my special train, one of you —" a man left the room hurriedly — "order 10,000 troops entrained and have them follow us within the hour."

The czar started from the room with a command to the others to follow him. At the door, however, he turned. Then he walked quickly across the room to where Jack, Frank and the Russian lieutenant stood.

"Will you go with me, sirs?" the czar demanded.

All three bowed.

"We are under your orders, sire," replied Jack quietly.

The czar of all the Russians looked at the three keenly for some moments and then laying a hand upon the shoulders of Jack and Frank, he said:

"I am going to Petrograd to recover my throne. I shall be glad of your assistance. Come!"

He strode from the room. Jack, Frank and Lieutenant Strogof followed.

CHAPTER VIII

PETROGRAD AGAIN

THE political unrest that was sweeping Russia at this time had, unknown to the czar, found its way even into his own circle of friends. This was one of the reasons that when the Russian ruler again found himself in his capital he did not have the support of the ten thousand troops he had ordered to follow him from Moscow.

The very man whom he had dispatched to make sure that the troops entrained and followed him immediately had proven false to him. The order was never given, so the royal train sped on its way to Petrograd alone.

It was late evening when the train drew up in the station at Petrograd and the czar and his suite alighted. No word of the czar's coming had been officially received in Petrograd, but word that the royal train was on the way had swept through the city.

The Duma sat in extra night session. The situation was tense. In spite of the fact that the plot

had been well laid and that there seemed little likelihood of a slip, conditions in Russia at that time were so chaotic that no man could tell what the next minute would bring forth.

At this time it seemed that all political factions had united in an effort against its sovereign. It is true that most of the plotters were moved by patriotic impulses, but there were those, too, who were looking only toward selfish ends. The men loyal to the government, though not to the czar, realized that they were bent upon a desperate undertaking and that a little slip was likely to prove their undoing. Therefore each looked upon all not members of his own particular faction with suspicion.

The streets of the capital were thronged with people when the czar and his suite, having commandeered automobiles at the railroad station, drove toward the palace. Resting secure in the belief that 10,000 loyal troops by this time were disembarking at the station, Czar Nicholas determined that, after a brief stay at the palace, he would call the Duma in session and dissolve it. His loyal troops he planned to throw around the parliament building to suppress first signs of trouble. All this might have worked well enough but for the fact that the loyal troops never reached Petrograd.

Whether through respect or fear, the Duma, upon word that the czar was approaching the city, had ordered an escort there to conduct him safely through the streets to the palace. It was no part of the Duma's plan to have Czar Nicholas shot down in the streets. This would have meant a siege of rioting and the Duma was counting upon what was termed a "bloodless revolution" to overthrow the czar.

Frank and Jack, upon the czar's express command, rode to the palace in the same car with him. Arrived at the palace, the czar went straight to the apartments of the Czarina, where he remained only a few minutes. It was reported afterwards that there were angry words between the two, but the nature of the conversation was never learned.

In the meantime, members of the czar's personal retinue had canvassed the city. It was learned then, for the first time, that the troops ordered from Moscow had not arrived. Plainly the czar's predicament was grave.

When Czar Nicholas emerged from his conference with the Czarina, he announced that he would summon the Duma into session at once.

"The Duma is already in session, sire," reported one of his officers.

The czar was momentarily surprised, but he was not dismayed.

"Have my troops surrounded the building?" he asked.

"The troops have not arrived, sire," said an officer.

"What's that?" exclaimed the czar. "Not arrived? Why haven't they arrived? Didn't I expressly command that they follow us?"

"You did, sire," was the reply, "but it appears that the order was never given."

"More treachery, eh?" muttered the czar. He was lost in thought a moment, then raised his head and said sharply: "I shall go to the Duma at once. You will send word that I shall be there in half an hour."

An officer bowed and left the room. The czar signaled to Jack and Frank to approach.

"I would have you both stay by my side," he said. "It seems that I cannot count upon my own countrymen, and I know that you are both true."

"We shall be glad, your majesty," said Frank.

"I wonder," said the czar, "if it is dangerous for me to appear before the Duma?"

"I am sure they will offer you no violence, sire," said Jack.

"Well," said the czar, "what will the Duma do?"

"Ask you to abdicate, sire."

"And if I refuse?"

"Arrest you, sire, and banish you from the country."

"I guess you are right," agreed the czar, "and yet if I agree to abdicate I probably should suffer the same fate."

"Most likely, your majesty," said Frank.

"Well," said the czar, "my mind is not made up. If I thought that my abdication would benefit my country I would give up the throne without hesitancy; but I am not sure of it. How do I know what would follow my abdication — revolution, rioting, bloodshed. If I could but be sure that the people do not want me longer."

"It's a hard problem, sire," said Jack, "and yet none but you can decide it."

"That's the trouble," said the czar with a rueful smile. "The tasks of kings and czars are not very easy." He turned to Frank. "You are an American," he said. "You come from the greatest republic in the world. Tell me, what would you do in my place?"

Frank flushed a trifle, but he answered boldly enough:

"I never was very fond of kings, sire. I've been taught that the rule of the people is the best rule."

"But if the people do not know what they want?" questioned the czar. "If they are not fit to govern themselves, then what?"

"Then they must learn, your majesty. The day, of course, will come when the people in all nations will rule, no matter what others may say — even in Germany, your majesty."

The czar, intelligent and capable man though he was, was plainly impressed with the lad's words.

"Come, now," he said. "Tell me what you would do if you were the czar of Russia and the Duma demanded that you abdicate?"

"Well, your majesty," said Frank slowly, "I suppose I would be tempted to fight; but if I were sure that the people wanted me no longer, and that I was standing in their way, I should abdicate without a murmur."

"But to be sure that you are helping your people, there is the trouble," said the czar.

"Very true, your majesty," agreed Frank, "and I should make sure first."

"If you can show me a way," declared the czar excitedly, "I shall act upon your suggestion."

Frank smiled.

"It would not be very hard, your majesty," he said quietly.

"Show me the way," said the czar briefly.

"First, your majesty," said Frank, "I should go before the Duma and learn the conditions. It may be that your abdication will not be demanded after all. But if it is, I should ask time to make a decision. Then, if you still wish to learn the wishes of the people, take an open carriage and drive through the streets of the capital, surrounding yourself with such guards only as are absolutely necessary to your safety. Get close to the people as you pass, hear their comments and watch their faces. In that way you may, perhaps, learn what you desire to know — whether the people themselves prefer you as their ruler or whether they wish to govern themselves."

The czar brought his hands together with a resounding smack.

"You've hit it!" he cried. "The very plan! I shall act upon your advice immediately. First I shall go to the Duma, and I want you and Lieutenant Templeton to accompany me, and stand near

me. I may be going to my death, but I still ask that I may have with me two loyal souls."

"We shall indeed be glad, your majesty," Jack interposed, "and you may count upon us to the end."

"I am sure of it," said Czar Nicholas very quietly.

For a moment he stood silent. Then he turned, and motioning the two lads to follow him, crossed the room to where his retinue stood waiting.

"Has word been sent to the Duma that I am coming?" he asked.

"It has, sire," replied one of the officers.

"Good!" said the czar. "My carriage!"

"It awaits you, sire."

"Then I shall go at once. Lieutenant Templeton! Lieutenant Chadwick! You shall ride with me!"

CHAPTER IX

THE DUMA

WHILE Czar Nicholas had talked with Jack and Frank, members of the Duma, sitting in the parliament building, squirmed uneasily in their seats. Their plans had progressed to such a point where there was nothing to do but wait. The parliament building, instead of being surrounded by troops loyal to the czar, was heavily guarded by soldiers under command of officers selected by the Duma.

Nevertheless, when the czar entered parliament hall, he was easily the least excited man in the building. The reason for this was clear. Czar Nicholas had just reached a decision with himself. He knew what he was going to do. Members of the Duma, on the other hand, were unable to say just what would develop and for this reason the very air was surcharged with suppressed excitement.

Followed by Jack, Frank and other members of his suite, Czar Nicholas walked quickly through the hall, while members of the Duma, from long custom, got to their feet respectfully.

The czar strode unconcernedly to a platform at the far end of the room. It was from this platform that he had been accustomed to direct the proceedings of the Duma when he felt so disposed. Nearby was a second elevated dais, the seat of the president of the Duma. Both of these faced the room itself.

Czar Nicholas sat down. The others did likewise. For perhaps a minute there was silence. Then the czar arose and faced the Duma.

"I have come, gentlemen," he said, "to learn what it is you desire of me."

He sat down again.

This brief speech apparently took the Duma by surprise. Members so far had not known the czar had been acquainted with what had transpired in his absence at the front. But now they realized that he knew.

The president of the Duma arose and cleared his throat. He was very nervous, but he pulled himself together with an effort and spoke.

"Your majesty knows," he said, "that the war has not been progressing satisfactorily. Our armies are being thrown back upon all fronts. There has been a lack of ammunition and of guns. Conditions are rapidly growing worse instead of better. The Duma has in its possession evidence

which proves that these conditions are the result of German intrigue in Russia — intrigue that has been permitted, if not openly aided, by men high in the councils of the empire. The Duma has decided that these conditions must be remedied before it is too late."

He paused, apparently expecting a reply from the czar, but the ruler of Russia sat silent.

"Therefore, your majesty," continued the president of the Duma, "it is the sense of the Duma that the destiny of Russia must be placed in other hands."

Czar Nicholas got to his feet as the president paused again. The latter respectfully waited for him to speak.

"What is it you wish me to do, gentlemen?" asked the czar quietly.

There was sudden confusion in the hall. Members jumped to their feet. Everybody seemed to talk at once, but it was the president of the Duma who said:

"Abdicate, your majesty!"

A sudden silence fell upon the room at these words. Many faces were white. Never had such a condition existed in Russia. Representatives of the people though they were, these members of the

Duma, now that their decision had been spoken aloud to the czar himself, were afraid.

But Czar Nicholas only smiled.

"I have expected this, gentlemen," he said in a clear voice. "You have not surprised me. Nevertheless, I felt it my duty to come before you and hear your decision. Will you explain a trifle more, Mr. President?"

"Your majesty," said the president of the Duma, "the people are demanding that we continue the war. It is not being done. It is our plan to appoint a military council and to lend our allies the assistance that we have promised. We considered using force, but I believe that, once you see the justice of our position, force will not be necessary. Besides, it will mean much more for Russia if you abdicate willingly."

"I see," said the czar. "Now I have a request to make. Will you grant me twenty-four hours in which to make my decision?"

Instantly all was confusion in the hall again.

"No! No!" cried some voices.

"Yes! Yes!" said others.

In vain the president rapped for order with his gavel. Men leaped up and down wildly. It appeared that a riot was imminent.

The president of the Duma, realizing what a catastrophe might follow a riot in the parliament building, summoned soldiers from without. These, with some effort, succeeded in quieting the tumult.

All through this, smiling slightly, Czar Nicholas stood quietly. There was no fear in his eyes. Members of his suite gathered more closely about him to defend him with their lives should it be necessary.

But at last order was restored.

"Your majesty," said the president of the Duma, "there seems to be some division here. The matter shall be put to a vote."

So it was done and when the result was announced it was found that by a majority of three the Duma had granted the czar's request.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said the czar. "You may expect me here at this hour to-morrow. I shall give you my decision then."

Holding himself stiffly erect, the czar crossed the room and passed out the door, members of his suite following him closely.

Behind, in the halls of parliament, the hubbub broke out afresh.

Back in the czar's palace the Russian ruler, after some conversation with various officers, summoned

Frank and Jack into a private apartment. There he took a seat and motioned the lads to do likewise.

"Well," he said quietly, when they had made themselves comfortable, "they've done what we all expected, but I want to tell you that there was more fear within members of the Duma than there was in the czar."

Czar Nicholas laughed long and heartily, a strange proceeding, it would seem, for a man who was about to lose his throne.

"There is no doubt of that, your majesty," said Frank, with a smile.

"Your majesty," repeated the czar slowly. "Your majesty, eh? Well, after to-morrow, most likely, it will be plain Mr. Romanoff, as you Americans would say."

Neither Jack nor Frank vouchsafed a reply, for in his own mind each was perfectly sure that Russia soon would be without a sovereign.

"What I asked you to come with me for," said the czar, "was to discuss with you further your plan of getting close to the people. I've an idea that it might as well be done at once."

"Hardly to-night, your majesty," said Jack glancing at his watch. "It's almost midnight."

"But there are still thousands of people on the streets," said the czar.

"True," agreed Frank, "but they would hardly recognize you in the darkness, your majesty. No, I should say it would be better to wait until morning."

"Very well," said the czar with a laugh. "It's your plan, you know. Therefore I place myself in your hands. Now what method do you suggest?"

"You ride, of course, sire?" asked Jack.

"They used to say I was a pretty fair horseman, in my younger days," was the czar's reply, "but I have not bestrode a horse for years, it seems. Nevertheless, I guess it can be done."

"Then," said Jack, "I would suggest that at 9 o'clock in the morning we ride forth through the streets. I should say that, for our purpose, it would be well to take the smallest possible number of men compatible with safety."

"We will go alone, if you say so," said Czar Nicholas, and added: "I'm not afraid."

"No, no, your majesty," protested Frank. "That would not be wise. There is no use of courting trouble. I would suggest that we be accompanied by at least twenty loyal men of unquestioned bravery."

"Twenty it shall be, then," declared the czar. "I shall pick them myself, and you may rely on their devotion to me. At 9 o'clock, you say?"

"I believe that would be a good hour," replied Frank. "We will ride through the streets until, say, noon. In that time you should be able to sound out your subjects."

"They probably won't be my subjects to-morrow at this time," said the czar with a sigh. "However, if it is for the best I will not complain. In spite of our coming expedition I am convinced now what my decision will be. However, we have arranged for it and we will carry it through. I will now have you shown to your chambers."

The czar tapped a small bell and a servant entered. Czar Nicholas gave the necessary directions and the servant motioned the lads to follow him.

"You may make yourselves free of my palace to-night," said the czar cheerfully. "After to-night you probably will find it necessary to seek permission elsewhere. I shall expect you here at a quarter before nine in the morning. Good-night."

"Good-night, your majesty," replied both lads together, saluted, and followed the servant from the room.

When they had gone the czar of all the Russians bowed his head in his hands and fell into a deep study. It was almost dawn when he retired.

CHAPTER X

THE PEOPLE SPEAK

IT was a silent little body of horsemen that rode slowly through the streets of Petrograd the following morning. Word that the czar was riding a horseback through the city flew quickly to almost every nook and cranny. The people streamed forth to see him.

News of the czar's travels carried quickly to the ears of members of the Duma and that body gathered hastily in the parliament building. Fear was expressed on all sides that the Czar Nicholas, by thus riding practically unguarded through the streets, was seeking to turn the tide of public sentiment in his favor — trying to call the people to him.

Resolutions were offered providing that troops be sent to arrest him at once. Some of these almost passed — probably would have passed had it not been for a member of the Duma named Kerensky, a man of the people, humbly born, but a gentleman and man of honor. Kerensky, the man who later

was to become practical dictator of Russia and who later was to flee with a price upon his head, because he did not use the strength he was given to crush his enemies —, after heated debate, reminded the members that they had agreed to wait one day upon the czar's decision; and under the influence of his voice and his bearing, the turmoil in the Duma subsided.

So the czar and his party were permitted to go their way unmolested by the Duma.

Ten men rode before the czar and the same number behind. This placed Frank and Jack on either side of the Russian ruler. The czar ordered the men ahead to precede him by twenty yards. Those behind he ordered to keep at a similar distance.

“We shall thus be able to hear the comments of the people,” he said to Frank.

The crowds that lined the streets were ominously quiet. It was not like the days when the passing of the “little father” was greeted with wild enthusiasm and cheering. This, better than anything else, told the czar that the people were no longer with him — that his hours as ruler of Russia were numbered.

Through all parts of the city the czar rode that morning, flanked on either side by Frank and Jack,

British naval officers, and front and rear by a mere handful of men.

In spite of its silence, the crowd that lined the streets in the first hour was respectfully silent. They did not cheer the czar, but neither did they denounce him or offer him violence.

Approaching a certain section of the city where the lower element was known to exist, the officer in command of the cavalcade ahead reined in, as did his men, until the czar, Frank and Jack came up with them.

"Why this change in order, sir?" asked the czar.

"It is safer, your majesty," was the reply. "See, these people are not overly fond of you. I fear violence, sire."

"I am still the Czar of Russia, sir," said the czar sternly. "I have given my commands to you once. They shall not be changed now. You will proceed, sir."

The officer hesitated and would have spoken, but the czar silenced him with a gesture.

"You will proceed immediately, sir," he commanded.

With a shrug of his shoulders the officer ordered his men forward. Nevertheless, Jack and Frank

could see that each man held his weapons ready for instant action.

Because the czar was between them, Frank and Jack could not converse, but the manner in which the troopers in front fidgeted nervously in their saddles caused the lads to smile at each other. Czar Nicholas caught this interchange of glances.

"Like you, sirs," he said, raising his voice a trifle so both lads could hear, "I see no need for all these precautions."

"It wasn't that we were smiling at, your majesty," declared Frank.

"What then?" asked the czar.

"I was smiling at the anxiety which hovers about yonder good officer," said Frank, indicating the man ahead. "His responsibility is grave and he realizes it."

"True," said the czar, and fell silent.

As the party moved forward, the crowd that lined either side of the street pressed closer to the horsemen. Several times Frank or Jack was forced to stop his horse so closely did the crowd press about them. This riding through a mob ready for violence at any minute was ticklish business, and both boys knew it. Nevertheless, each realized that a single show of anger would probably precipitate

trouble. So they smiled continually, as did the czar.

Occasionally now the czar caught remarks from the crowd.

"He looks all right," said a man sullenly, "but they tell me he is in league with the German emperor to crush us."

"Of course he is," said another. "It's time the Duma deposed him."

The czar compressed his lips. He lost his smile; but he said nothing.

Farther along hisses arose from the crowd. Still the czar said nothing.

Frank glanced at his watch.

"Eleven o'clock."

He spoke to the czar.

"Shall we not return to the palace now, your majesty?" he asked.

"Not yet," was the reply.

The little cavalcade continued on its way.

Suddenly, as the czar passed a particular spot, there was a sudden movement in the crowd and a shrill cry. Jack, his eyes ever alert, saw something flying through the air and realized on the instant what it was.

"A bomb!" he muttered.

The lad realized, too, that should it strike the czar, the ground or any solid substance at the rate of speed it was sailing through the air, the czar and all near him were doomed.

An idea flashed through his head. It seemed the only chance.

Spurring his horse ahead a trifle, Jack flung out his left hand. A moment later he felt something touch it. At the same moment, he allowed his hand to swing wide, thus breaking the shock of the catch, and the bomb lay safely within his hand.

Jack gazed at the bomb quickly and carefully. There was no fuse attached. This meant that the bomb was so constructed as to explode upon impact. There was no danger of an explosion now unless something struck the explosive or Jack should drop it.

As the bomb had gone hurtling through the air, the crowd that lined the streets parted with loud cries as if by magic. Members of the czar's guard who were ahead wheeled sharply and dashed back to his side. Those from behind spurred rapidly forward, and in a moment the czar was closely hemmed in by his loyal followers.

The street now was deserted save for the czar and his men. Even the man who had hurled the

bomb had not stayed to see the result of his work. No heads peeped from windows or around corners, for the terror-stricken people were afraid of the explosion they felt would soon come. Each man was bent upon getting as far from the spot as possible with all possible haste.

So, as Jack still held the bomb securely, there was no danger for the moment.

The officer in charge of the troops now took peremptory command.

"About wheel!" he commanded.

The czar, caught in the midst of the horses, was forced about whether or no; and the cavalcade headed for the palace at a rapid trot.

They arrived at the palace without incident and dismounted, Jack still holding the bomb in his left hand. The officer in command of the party now offered to relieve Jack of the explosive and the lad turned it over to him. Then the czar motioned Jack and Frank to follow him to his private apartments.

Not a word did the czar speak until they were by themselves. Then he turned and extended a hand to Jack.

"That was quick thinking and quick work," he said, as Jack bent over his hand. "I saw the missile

coming and felt we were all doomed. How did you conceive the manner of staying the flight of the bomb and preventing its explosion?"

"I don't know, your majesty," said Jack truthfully. "It just flashed through my head that if I could catch it without permitting the force of impact it might not explode."

"It was neatly done, Jack," said Frank quietly.

"It was indeed," declared the czar, "and I have to thank you, sir, for saving my life."

"It was nothing, your majesty," exclaimed Jack, flushing.

"Now," said the czar, "that we are back safely — and for the moment I never expected to see the palace again — I want to say to you, Lieutenant Chadwick, that I am glad I followed your suggestion to get nearer to my people. It has settled everything."

"You mean — ?" began Frank.

"I mean," said Czar Nicholas very quietly, "that the Duma is right. The people are tired of their 'little father.' Fit or not, they must be allowed to try and govern themselves. I mean that I have decided to step down from my throne — I have decided to abdicate!"

CHAPTER XI

THE ABDICATION

CZAR NICHOLAS' hours of royalty were fast drawing to a close. At 10 o'clock this night he was prepared to go again before the Duma and step down from the throne of Russia.

Russia, in turn, was to become a republic.

In the Duma preparations had been completed to take over the reins of government the moment he gave up the throne, or to remove him forcibly should he refuse at the last moment to abdicate. A war council had been formed, including, besides members of the Duma in its personnel, representatives of the arm and navy and men supposedly close to the masses of the people. It was confidently believed that there would be no bloodshed — that the revolution would be bloodless.

It is probable that all might have gone well enough had it not been for the petty jealousies among the various factions which composed the Duma. Even before the abdication of Czar Nich-

olas, these factions were fighting among themselves, each trying to obtain the upper hand.

Nicholas Romanoff passed his last hours as ruler of Russia quietly in the palace. From time to time he summoned members of his official and private family, to whom he gave certain commands. The czar was trying in every way he knew how to step down quietly and without ostentation.

He dispatched a courier to his uncle, the Grand Duke Nicholas, commander in chief of all the Russian armies in the field, apprising him of what he was about to do. He did this for several reasons — first, because he feared that an effort might be made to remove the grand duke forcibly, and, second, to prevent possible mutiny among the troops. He asked the grand duke to explain to the men that he was giving up the throne for what he believed to be the good of Russia.

So the hour of the czar's abdication drew near.

At a quarter of ten o'clock, the czar summoned his carriage and made ready to go before the Duma. As a last request, Jack and Frank accompanied him as members of his suite.

The streets were lined with people as the royal carriage passed slowly along toward the parliament building. There was no cheering. It was per-

factly plain that the people knew what was about to happen and that their sympathies were not with the czar.

An even greater crowd stood before the parliament building, held back by dense masses of troops. These cleared a way for the czar's carriage and the carriages of his friends. The czar alighted and rapidly mounted the steps.

Inside, members of the Duma, apprised that the czar was about to enter, got to their feet and stood silently. This was in marked contrast with the proceeding of the night before, when the parliament had almost been thrown into a riot.

With his friends grouped closely about him, Czar Nicholas for the last time strode across the hall to his accustomed place and sat down. For several moments there was a breathless stillness, then the president of the Duma spoke.

"Your majesty has come, I presume, with your answer?" he said.

Czar Nicholas rose.

"Before giving my decision," he said, "I have several questions I would like to ask."

He looked at the president of the Duma for permission to go on.

"Proceed, your majesty," was the reply.

"Very well. Then, supposing that I agree to abdicate, what will be done with me?"

The president of the Duma hesitated a moment and frowned. But at last he said:

"Arrested, your majesty."

"As I thought. And then?"

Again the president of the Duma hesitated.

"Exiled, sire," he said at last.

"And my family, and my friends?"

"Your family shall not be allowed to suffer, sir. All provisions have been made for that. As to your friends, I cannot say. If they are loyal to Russia they shall not be harmed, sir."

"Very well," said the czar. "Have you the necessary papers ready for me to sign?"

"Yes, sire."

The president of the Duma picked several papers from his own desk and laid them before the czar. The latter scanned them closely.

Once signed, these papers would mean that the family of the Romanoffs no longer ruled in Russia. They provided the abdication of Czar Nicholas and his heirs.

The eyes of every member of the Duma strained anxiously as the czar scanned the papers. There was an air of suppressed excitement in the hall.

Outside the building, the crowd had become silent, realizing the importance of affairs being conducted within. Every man and woman in the vast assemblage was anxiously awaiting some word that would proclaim that Czar Nicholas no longer ruled in Russia.

Carefully Czar Nicholas spread the papers upon the desk and as carefully removed the glove on his right hand. He was perfectly cool. He put a hand into his pocket and withdrew it empty.

He turned to the president of the Duma with a smile.

"Your pen, sir, if you please," he said.

The president picked up a long pen from his own desk and extended it to the czar, but so nervous was he that the pen slipped from his fingers as the czar would have taken it.

It was the czar himself who stooped and recovered the pen.

"Your nerves need attention, I am sure, Mr. President," he said quietly.

Rapidly now he dashed the pen across both documents that lay before him. He blotted them himself, turned then and returned the pen to the president of the Duma. This time the latter did not drop it.

"There you are, sir," said the czar quietly.

Nicholas Romanoff was no longer a czar. He had signed away his throne in the interest of his country. Russia was a republic at last.

A mighty roar went up inside the parliament building:

"Long live Russia!"

The words carried to the waiting crowd without and told their story to the people as though they had been within to witness the czar's abdication. And the crowd without caught up the words and echoed and re-echoed them until it seemed that the very sound must shatter the ears.

After the one burst of cheering, the interior of parliament became quiet. The czar spoke to the president of the Duma.

"What will you have me do now?" he asked.

For answer, the president of the Duma turned and motioned to an officer and a squad of soldiers who stood nearby. These approached. The president of the Duma swept an arm toward the czar.

"Arrest him," he said.

The men advanced.

But this was more than the dozen or more men who had accompanied the czar had bargained for.

They were not ready to stand by and see the czar roughly handled by a squad of soldiers.

Revolvers flashed in their hands and spat fire. Two of the approaching soldiers dropped to the floor. In less time than it takes to tell it, the Duma was in an uproar.

At a sharp command from the officers, the soldiers attacked by the czar's friends returned the fire. A revolver bullet barely missed the czar's left ear. A moment later he felt himself dragged roughly to one side.

Frank and Jack had seized him simultaneously to draw him out of harm's way.

"Keep quiet, your majesty," said Jack.

But the deposed czar would not have it so. He shook off the lads' hands and got to his feet. Then he raised his voice in a loud cry:

"Stop shooting, men! It is I, the czar, who speaks!"

His words were commanding, and for a moment the tumult died down. The czar took advantage of this to step forward and say quietly:

"I have given up the throne. I am no longer your czar, nor am I in position to issue commands, yet I would say this: I have surrendered myself to the Duma and I am under its protection. Let

no man raise a hand to defend me. To those of you who have been my friends, I would say this: Go your ways and do what you can to save Russia. That is all."

He turned to the president of the Duma and added: "I am your prisoner, but I would ask that you allow my friends to depart."

The president of the Duma shook his head.

"They are under arrest, too," he said.

Realizing that they could be of no further assistance to the czar, Frank and Jack had edged toward the door. They did not expect to be interfered with, but neither was of a mind to look at the interior of a Russian prison if it could be helped. Near the door they stopped.

"Ready for a dash, Frank," said Jack quietly. "Keep your guns ready."

"All right," was Frank's whispered reply.

The president of the Duma swept the room with his eye. He espied Jack and Frank, still attired in their British naval uniforms, near the door. He pointed them out to a squad of soldiers.

"Seize them!" he cried.

CHAPTER XII

FUGITIVES

JACK took in the situation at a glance. The nearest door was perhaps ten paces away. There were three soldiers in front of it.

Jack did not hesitate.

"Quick, Frank!" he cried, and sprang forward.

Frank was right behind him. The soldiers in the door, although brought to a realization of what was impending by the words of the president of the Duma a moment before Jack leaped, still were caught off their balance as the lads hurled themselves forward.

Frank held a revolver in both hands, but Jack had drawn only with his right. His left fist shot out suddenly and caught the nearest Russian soldier under the chin. The man toppled to the floor with a crash.

"No shooting, Frank!" Jack cried at the same instant.

At almost the same moment Jack brought the revolver in his left hand down upon a second soldier's

head. This man, too, fell in his tracks. The third soldier had covered Jack with his rifle and his finger tightened on the trigger.

But before he could fire, Frank, unheeding of Jack's injunction now that his friend seemed on the threshold of death, raised his revolver and fired.

The Russian's rifle blazed forth as he staggered back, but Jack was unhit.

From behind other rifles were now brought to bear, but Jack and Frank acted so promptly that the Russians had no time to fire.

The two threw themselves against the closed door simultaneously and it gave way beneath their weight with a crash; and they found themselves on the outside and running down a long hall.

As they turned an elbow in the hall, several flashes came from behind and they heard the scream of bullets over and around them. As they darted around the corner, two Russian soldiers barred their way, their rifles half raised. It was no time to hesitate.

Both lads raised their revolvers — Jack had drawn his second weapon as he ran — and fired. The two soldiers crumpled up and lay still.

"Not out the front way," cried Frank as they dashed along. "There are thousands there who would tear us limb from limb."

The lads did not hesitate, therefore, before the door of the main entrance to the building, but continued to the other side, and disappeared around another elbow just as the first of the pursuers came into the main corridor. These caught sight of the lads and again rifles spoke.

These bullets, too, went wide of their mark.

"There must be another door some place," said Frank.

At the far end of the hall they found it. In the door Jack paused a moment and quietly slipped his revolvers into his pockets, whispering to Frank to do the same. His reason for this soon became apparent.

At the foot of steps which led to the building a sea of faces looked up. The crowd had gathered even here while historic events were in progress within. The crowd had no means of telling what was transpiring within and was awaiting some word. They were held back by a line of soldiers with rifles held ready. Apparently the sound of shots within had not reached them.

In spite of the danger so close behind, Frank and Jack descended the steps slowly. Their one hope of safety lay in passing that line of soldiers without arousing suspicion.

Two steps from the bottom, there came to the lads' ears the sounds of running footsteps behind. They hurried their pace a trifle. The Russian soldiers moved aside to let them pass. They mingled with the crowd.

At the same moment a squad of soldiers appeared in the open door of parliament building. Hoarse commands were shouted by an officer to the soldiers below holding the crowd in check.

"Two British officers!" he cried. "Seize them!"

The men who had allowed the lads to pass a moment before dashed forward, repeating the cry, which was caught up by the crowd.

Attired as they were in the British uniforms, there was no chance that the lads would be undetected. The cries of the crowd traveled faster than they could elbow their way through.

"There they are!" cried a voice near.

"Come, Frank," said Jack quietly.

He stooped slightly, hunched his shoulder, and using it as a battering ram, forced his way through the crowd to the outer edge. The Russians, densely massed though they were, could not resist him, and a moment later, with Frank at his heels, Jack found himself in the clear.

"Run!" he cried, and suited the action to the word.

Frank dashed after him.

From behind the crowd raised a hue and cry and dashed in pursuit. Rifles cracked and the lads felt the breeze of bullets more than once, but they had put some distance between themselves and the soldiers now and so felt comparatively safe. They realized that the danger lay chiefly in the direction of the soldiers, for there was little likelihood that men who formed the crowd would be armed with rifles.

"Double around that next corner!" cried Frank, as he ran after Jack.

Jack needed no urging, and for a moment after they rounded the corner they were safe from flying bullets.

"And around the next one too," said Jack grimly, and led the way just as the first of their pursuers came in sight and opened fire. Jack heard a bullet sing past his left ear and smiled slightly.

"A couple of more turns like that and we will be safe enough," he said.

They doubled the next corner before the pursuers came into sight, and after several other twists

and turns they felt they were safe. They slowed down for a breathing spell.

"Guess we're safe enough now," gasped Frank.

"Don't you believe it," said Jack. "They know how we're dressed and they will scour the city for us. They won't give up, either, until they have nabbed us."

"The best trick, then," said Frank, "is to get rid of these uniforms."

"Good idea," said Jack, "but how?"

"Simple enough. We'll hold up the first two men we see and take their clothes."

In spite of the seriousness of their situation, Jack grinned in the darkness.

"Not a bad idea," he agreed. "We'll try it."

They set out slowly straining their eyes for the sight of a pedestrian. Suddenly Frank grabbed Jack by the arm.

"Here comes one," he said.

A man swung toward them at a rapid walk. As he came abreast, Frank stepped forward and took him by the arm, at the same time putting a revolver to his head.

"Hands up!" he cried, "and make no sound!"

The man struggled a moment, but he made no effort to cry out. Calming himself, he asked.

"What do you want? I have no money."

"It's not money we're after," said Frank. "We want your clothes."

"My clothes?"

"Yes."

Frank explained briefly.

"All right," said the victim. "You're welcome to them as long as you don't hurt me."

"Strip, then," said Frank.

The man obeyed.

"You'll have to change here, Frank," said Jack. "His clothes are not big enough for me."

"Better luck for you next time, then," said Frank, and began to get out of his uniform.

The change was completed in a few moments, and the lads allowed their prisoner to go, attired in Frank's uniform.

"Poor fellow," said Frank, "hope they don't shoot him for me."

"Well, they —" began Jack, and broke off — "Hello! Here's another one and a pretty husky looking customer, too. We'll nail him."

They accosted the second man in the same manner they had the first. But this man showed fight. He was big and powerful and not at all intimidated by the revolver Frank thrust in his face.

“ Oh, well,” said Jack, as the three struggled, “ if you must have it —”

He drew back his right hand and brought his fist up under the man’s chin. The victim toppled over without a word.

“ Strip him while I disrobe, Frank,” said Jack.

Frank obeyed. Jack climbed into the Russian’s clothes and threw the uniform over the victim.

“ Sorry I haven’t time to dress you,” he muttered, “ but time presses.”

He turned at the sound of footsteps behind him, as did Frank, and both lads staggered back in alarm.

Not ten yards from them stood four Russian soldiers with rifles leveled squarely at them.

“ Surrender ! ” cried one.

CHAPTER XIII

FIGHT AND ESCAPE

"GREAT Scott!" exclaimed Frank under his breath.

It was indeed a serious position in which the two lads found themselves. True, they had managed to get rid of their British uniforms, but the one that Jack had so recently discarded now lay over their fallen victim, mute evidence of what had transpired.

In the mind of each lad there sprung sudden resentment at thus being captured when it seemed they had successfully eluded their captors. Both reached the same conclusion subconsciously. It was this:

"I am not going to be made prisoner now."

They looked at each other and nodded understandingly.

"Surrender!" cried one of the soldiers again.

Both lads raised their hands high above their heads in token of surrender. The four soldiers lowered their rifles and advanced.

"So," said one who seemed to be the leader of the party. "So, we have you, eh?"

"It certainly looks that way," Jack agreed with a smile. "Question is, what are you going to do with us?"

The conversation, of course, was carried on in French, for Frank and Jack had only a smattering of Russian. •

"Take you back and turn you over to the president of the Duma," the Russian made reply. "You are the two British officers who escaped from there."

"Do we look like British officers?" demanded Frank, determined to see whether the man really knew **their identity**.

"You may not look like it now," the Russian admitted, "but I happened to see you appropriate that man's clothing there," and he indicated the unconscious man on the ground. "I've no doubt that if I were to search I would find another such victim."

"You seem to know all about us," said Jack.

"I know enough about you to take no chances," said the Russian. "About face and forward march."

The lads argued no farther. Each was relieved that the Russian had not asked them to turn over their weapons to him, and each felt sure that he

would not have done so without a fight. Both lads knew that deprived of arms their situation would be all the more grave. As long as they had weapons, there was always the chance that the opportunity might develop to make use of them.

For perhaps two blocks the lads went along quietly enough, their captors walking so close behind as to almost tread upon their heels. Suddenly Jack appeared to stumble.

The Russian soldiers halted, naturally enough, and waited for him to recover himself. Frank stepped forward as though to lend his friend a helping hand. He had not been deceived by Jack's stumble and he felt that the time was ripe for action.

"Hurt, Jack?" he asked, loud enough for the Russians to hear.

"Guess not," was the reply, and Jack turned to face his pursuers.

The Russians had grounded their rifles and stood looking curiously at Jack.

"Guns, Frank!" whispered Jack.

Suddenly the lad sprang to his feet and Frank ranged alongside of him. Four revolvers flashed out and covered the surprised Russians.

"Down with those guns!" cried Jack sternly.

The Russians looked helplessly at their leader. This man stood his ground.

He raised his rifle quickly and called to his men:
"Shoot them!"

But Frank was too quick for him. Before the Russian could raise his rifle shoulder high, Frank's right hand revolver cracked sharply and the Russian fell to rise no more. With the revolver in his other hand Frank still covered another of the enemy.

"Down with those guns!" cried Jack again.

The Russians hesitated no longer. Their rifles fell to the ground with a clatter.

"Guess we'd better play safe and take the guns with us," said Jack.

He moved forward to pick them up, but as he did so there came a sharp crack back down the street and a bullet passed close. Jack wheeled sharply.

There, not half a block away, came fully a dozen Russian soldiers.

"Quick, Frank!" cried Jack, and turning again, took to his heels.

Frank followed close behind him.

The Russians so recently disarmed dashed forward, and picking up their guns again, threw them to their shoulders and fired rapidly at the fleeing

lads. Fortunately, their aim was poor and the boys rounded the next corner to safety without being hit.

For perhaps a mile they ran, doubling around corner after corner, till they at last felt they were safe from pursuit. Then they slowed down for breath.

"Guess we're safe enough this time," said Jack, panting.

"By George! I hope so," declared Frank. "I don't like this idea of skulking around in the dark."

"Nor I; particularly in a country that is supposed to be one of our allies."

"Russia doesn't seem to be much of an ally any longer," said Frank. "Looks as though we would have to lick the kaiser without her assistance."

"It looks that way, all right," Jack agreed, "but everything may turn out for the best. Poor old czar!"

"Poor old czar, is right," Frank agreed. "But come, let's get away from here. First thing you know we'll be picked up again and we may not be fortunate enough to get away again."

"Well, where shall we go?" Jack wanted to know. "I don't know where we are; do you?"

"Haven't the slightest idea," said Frank cheerfully. "My suggestion would be that we hunt a

hotel and put up for the night. We can ask the necessary directions in the morning."

"Good idea," agreed Jack. "Let's find the hotel."

This proved to be rather a hard job, for their flight had taken them far from the center of the city. But they made their way back at last and found a hotel without further incident. They went to bed the moment they were shown to their room.

Both lads were astir early the following morning. From the clerk they learned that they could catch a train to Riga at 9 o'clock. This would put them in the Russian seaport some time before midnight, barring accidents.

"It'll be too late to go aboard," said Frank, "but the closer we are to the *D-32* the better, I should say."

"Exactly," Jack agreed.

The trip to Riga was made without incident. It was almost midnight when the train pulled in and the lads' first thought was to find a place to stay for the night. They tried several hotels but in each case were informed that all the rooms were taken.

"You'd think a convention was going on," said Frank angrily when they had been turned down for the fifth time. "Wonder what the trouble is."

"You know as much about it as I do," declared Jack, "However, we'll try one more, and if they can't find a place for us we'll ask permission to sit up in the office all night. We can't go prowling about the streets like this."

They had no better luck at the next hotel they tried, a small hostelry in an obscure section of the city near the water front. The clerk, an elderly man, however, announced that they could occupy chairs in the office without charge if they so desired.

"You will find that there are many others without beds to-night," he said.

"What's the cause of all this crowd?" demanded Jack.

The clerk shrugged.

"I don't know," he answered.

The lads found two chairs close together at a far end of the little lobby. Both breathed sighs of relief as they sank down among the cushions. The chairs were very large and their heads did not reach the tops; and to the fact that they were forced thus to sit up all night, was due the failure of the German fleet to destroy the Russian Baltic sea squadron.

Both lads were dozing when they were aroused by the sounds of voices nearby. Frank, listening with-

out moving his position, caught a sentence that put him instantly on the alert.

"So the German fleet will strike to-morrow, eh?" said a voice.

"Yes," replied a second voice. "Thursday morning at daybreak is the hour."

"Good. The Russians will be caught off their guard and exterminated before they have a chance to offer resistance."

"You think there is no chance that the Russians have been warned?"

"Not the slightest. Even if they had, it would not affect the result. They would still be beaten, though they might perhaps do considerable damage first."

"And how about the land attack to follow?"

"All arranged. Riga is crowded to-night with German troops disguised as civilians. This morning these men will take up a position outside the city. They will not be molested, we have assurance of that. We will be in force enough to protect a landing party should there be resistance."

"Good. I hope there is no hitch."

The voices became silent.

CHAPTER XIV

FRANK TRIES A RUSE

JACK, who had also been aroused by the sound of voices, understood their significance as well as did Frank. When the voices became silent, the thoughts of each lad were bent upon getting out of the hotel without arousing an alarm.

Carefully Frank poked his head from behind the shelter of his chair. There, in full view, not fifteen feet away, were the men whose conversation he had overheard. But for the fact that they sat with their heads close together they must have seen him.

Frank drew back quickly, and leaning close to Jack explained the situation in a low voice.

"But we've got to get out of here," Jack whispered back.

Frank nodded affirmatively.

"And we don't want to be discovered," he said. "They probably would not have time to warn the German fleet now, but they might shoot us and thus prevent our warning the Russian fleet."

"We'll have to take a chance though," said Jack.

"Well, what do you suggest?"

"I think it would be well for us to wait here until daylight, pretending we are asleep. Those fellows may leave before that. If they don't we'll simply walk away as though we had heard nothing. We are not in uniform, you know, they may not suspect us."

"I guess that is as good a way as another," said Frank.

Both lads sank back in their chair and pretended to be asleep. But each kept one eye open, so to speak, for they were anxious to be on their way. They determined to leave the hotel as soon as the way was clear.

But daylight came and still the men near had not moved. Frank nudged Jack.

"We may as well be moving," he said.

"Right. Those fellows may be asleep. Follow me."

Jack rose and stretched himself and pretended to rub the sleep from his eyes. He yawned widely. Frank followed suit. Then Jack led the way to the desk, where he thanked the clerk for his hospitality.

"It's all right," said the clerk. "Come again when we have rooms to rent you."

Jack nodded and moved toward the door, Frank by his side.

To reach the door it was necessary that they pass the men whose conversation they had overheard several hours before. Jack would have passed along quietly had not one of the men suddenly sprang to his feet and barred his path.

"I say," said Jack, in his best French. "What's the meaning of this?"

"It means," said the man, attired in civilian garb, but with a German accent, "that I believe you were listening to a conversation I had with my friend a short time ago."

"Believe what you please," said Jack, "only get out of my way."

By this time the other man had got to his feet. He too eyed Jack and Frank angrily.

"Will you deny that you overheard our conversation?" the second man demanded.

"If you had accosted me in the proper way I might have denied it, yes," said Jack. "But I answer no questions when a man insults me."

The second man wavered, but the first seemed to grow angrier.

"Will you answer my question or not?" he demanded.

"I will not," said Jack quietly.

The man stepped back and his hand went to his pocket; but Jack was too quick for him.

"None of that!" he said sharply.

His left hand shot out and seized the other's wrist even as the man produced a revolver. Jack twisted sharply and the revolver fell to the floor with a clatter.

At the same moment Frank whipped out a revolver and covered the second man. The latter raised his hands in the air.

The sounds of confusion attracted others to the scene.

"Hold 'em off, Frank," said Jack quietly. "These fellows may have friends here."

Frank produced a second revolver and swept those in front of him.

"Keep away!" he commanded.

The clerk came rushing up.

"What's the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"It's very simple, sir," replied Jack. "My friend and I were making our way from your hotel when these men accosted us. One of them tried to shoot me, as you may see — there's his revolver on the floor. I took it away from him. These men seem obsessed with the idea that we are enemies.

I assure you I never saw them before, nor do I care to see them again. All I desire is to be allowed to depart in peace."

The clerk demanded an explanation from the others. They had no explanation to give.

"There will be no fighting in this hotel," said the clerk and produced a brace of automatics of his own. He turned to Jack. "You and your friend will kindly put up your weapons and leave this hotel," he said. "I shall see that no one interferes with you."

Jack did not hesitate, nor did Frank. They pocketed their weapons and left the hotel.

"We're lucky to get out of this as easily as we did," declared Frank, as they walked toward the water front.

"Rather," agreed Jack dryly. He cast a glance over his shoulder. "As I suspected," he said quietly, "they are following us."

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" asked Frank. "If they see us dicker with a boatman to take us out to the Russian flagship, they'll probably take a shot at us."

"You stay here and hold them off," said Jack. "I'll go on and arrange for a boat and come back

for you. Get the drop on them and keep them here until I come back."

"Go ahead," said Frank.

Frank lagged behind as Jack strode forward. A moment or so later he was conscious of footsteps close behind him. He whirled about suddenly, and his two revolvers covered the same two men who had accosted the lads in the hotel.

Taken by surprise, the men stopped.

"Hands up!" said Frank sharply.

Two pairs of hands went high in the air.

"Now," said Frank, "I want to know what you mean by following me like this?"

One of the men mumbled something unintelligible.

"Out with it," ordered Frank.

"We wanted to see where you were going," was the reply.

"Why?" demanded Frank, simply talking to gain time.

"Well, we thought you overheard our conversation."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Frank in well simulated surprise. "Haven't you been convinced yet that we haven't. But it seems to me," he added,

his voice taking on a grave tone, "that your suspicious actions should be reported to the authorities. It must be something pretty serious or you wouldn't be so anxious to learn whether I overheard it."

"Oh, no, that wasn't it," replied one of the men hastily.

Frank's last words had done more to convince him that his suspicions were unfounded than any denials the lad might have made. The man turned to his companion and spoke in English, apparently believing Frank did not understand that language.

"We must be wrong," he said hurriedly. "These men don't know what is up."

The other nodded.

"You are right," he said. "We will apologize and have him let us go."

Frank smiled grimly to himself, but said nothing. The man who had first spoken now addressed him.

"We are sorry we have been discourteous, sir," he said civilly enough. "We wish to apologize and be on our way."

"Why," said Frank, "I am sure there is no harm done, and if you will agree not to bother me again I will put down my guns."

"We assure you that we mean no harm," was the reply.

Frank lowered his revolvers and returned them to his pockets.

"Very well," he said. "Your apology is accepted. Good day, gentlemen."

He turned on his heel and strode away. Having overheard their conversation in English, he felt perfectly safe in turning his back on them.

As Frank moved away the men gazed after him curiously then, with shrugs, they, too, turned, and soon disappeared down the street.

Frank found Jack dickering with a boatman over the price of a trip to the flagship. They hit upon a figure suitable to both just as Frank arrived.

"Hello," said Jack as Frank hove in sight, "what did you do with our friends the enemy?"

"Convinced them they were on the wrong track," grinned Frank.

"Good for you. Well, let's get out to the flagship and tell what we know."

"And after that," said Frank, "ho! for the *D-32* once more."

CHAPTER XV

THE FLEET IS WARNED

ADMIRAL DARWISKI himself greeted the lads as they came over the side of the flagship. He recognized them instantly in spite of the fact that they no longer wore their British uniforms. The admiral had been very anxious ever since the lads together with Lieutenant Strogof had left for Petrograd. The lieutenant had not returned, and he had been unable to get any authentic word of what had transpired in the capital. This was due to the fact that the telegraph wires had been cut.

"Come to my cabin, sirs!" he exclaimed when the lads stepped on deck and saluted.

Frank and Jack followed him without question.

"Where is Lieutenant Strogof?" asked Admiral Darwiski when they were in his cabin.

"I don't know, sir," replied Jack. "I saw him last in Petrograd when the czar went before the Duma."

"I would not be surprised, sir," said Frank, "if he had not joined the revolutionists."

"The revolutionists!" echoed the admiral.

"Surely, sir," exclaimed Frank, "you have been informed that the czar has abdicated?"

"Abdicated?" exclaimed Admiral Darwiski in the utmost surprise. "No, I had not heard his majesty had abdicated."

"Nevertheless it is true," said Jack quietly.

Admiral Darwiski's clenched fist struck the table at which he sat a heavy blow.

"They shall pay for this!" he exclaimed.

"It is not so bad as that, your excellency," said Frank. "The czar stepped down from the throne of his own free will. He said he took the step for his country and for his people. He was not deposed forcibly."

"Explain," said Admiral Darwiski briefly.

Frank did so. Slowly the anger left the admiral's face.

"It is well," he said at last. "I myself have been of the opinion that the war would be prosecuted successfully with other hands at the helm. But it is strange I have not been informed."

"It is, sir," Jack agreed. "Nevertheless, I presume you will be in good time. Do I understand that you will place yourself at the service of the republic?"

"Of course," replied Admiral Darwiski simply.

"Then," said Jack, "we have news of vast importance."

"Tell it to me," said the Russian admiral.

Quickly Jack related the plot they had overheard in Riga early in the morning.

"So," said Admiral Darwiski when he had concluded, "the Germans think to take advantage of our personal quarrels, eh? Well, they will be very much surprised when they attack the Russian fleet. We are outnumbered and we are outweighed in ships and armament, but we will fight to the last. And I know that I can count upon the aid of the British submarines here now."

"Undoubtedly, sir," said Jack quietly.

"Yes, we will fight," repeated Admiral Darwiski, "but I could wish that first I might receive orders from the directorate."

"It may be that you will receive orders before the battle begins," said Jack.

In fact this proved the case. Inkling of the approach of the German battle fleet in some manner reached the authorities in Petrograd. Wires were still down, but a special courier was dispatched to Admiral Darwiski explaining the change in government and directing that he engage the enemy.

Then Admiral Darwiski's face cleared.

After some further talk with the Russian admiral, Jack indicated their desire to return aboard the *D-32*. Admiral Darwiski immediately placed a small boat at their disposal, and half an hour later they were shaking hands with Lord Hastings.

The lads related their adventures and then told Lord Hastings of the approaching battle. Lord Hastings immediately wirelessly the services of the British submarine flotilla to Admiral Darwiski. The admiral's reply was characteristic.

"We would like to defeat the enemy unaided," he said, "but if the situation becomes desperate I shall call on you. Will you consider yourselves as reserve units?"

"I am afraid," said Lord Hastings when he read this message, "that we shall not be called upon until too late. But we are under the admiral's orders and must do as he dictates. But come, the time is long yet, tell me more of my old friend the czar. Where is he now?"

"I don't know, sir," said Frank. "The last I saw of him he had just been placed under arrest. Jack and I decided we would rather be here than in Siberia or a Russian prison, so we made a break for it."

"Well, I am glad you're back safely," said Lord Hastings, "but I am afraid that the czar may suffer."

"It can't be helped, sir," said Jack.

"No," Lord Hastings agreed, "and it may all work out for the best. It is no secret that England and France have not been satisfied with the way Russia has been conducting herself in this war. More than once we have made representations seeking to have her put forth greater efforts."

"Will the allies recognize the new government, sir?" asked Frank.

"Most likely, I should say. We shall first seek to ascertain whether it is a stable government, and if it is we shall lend it our cordial support. Trouble is, that people not used to governing themselves usually make a botch of it."

"But they must learn some time, sir," said Frank.

"That's true enough," Lord Hastings admitted, "but I'm half afraid these people don't know how to do it."

"That's what the English said when America wanted to try it," said Frank slyly.

Lord Hastings eyed his second officer sternly.

"Such talk as that," he said, "is unbecoming a British officer," but he smiled nevertheless.

"I'm a British officer," said Frank, "but I am still an American, sir."

"Right you are, my boy," said Lord Hastings, laying a hand on Frank's shoulder. "We are all glad that the old sore has been healed, Great Britain as well as America."

"And we shall be closer together than ever after this war is over," declared Jack.

For some time Lord Hastings was silent, apparently lost in reverie. But he shook off his thoughts a few moments later and pointed across the water to where great clouds of black smoke were beginning to pour from the Russian flagship and other vessels that composed Russia's Baltic fleet.

"Getting steam up," he said. "Admiral Darwiski will move out to meet the enemy, unless I am greatly mistaken."

Lord Hastings was right. Like the good officer he was, Admiral Darwiski knew that it would be tempting Providence to give battle to the Germans this close to shore, even though he would be under the protection of the great land batteries. Up to this time the Russian fleet had been believed comparatively safe behind the mine fields that guarded the entrance to the Gulf of Riga. But Admiral Darwiski, better than any other man perhaps, knew

that the mine fields were not the formidable barriers they had been in the early days of the war.

Spies had been active in Russia. It was probable that the German commander had a chart showing the exact locations of the mines. Also, with the Russian fleet steaming to meet the enemy, the advantage of surprise would be with the Russians. Instead of waiting for the enemy to attack at daylight, Admiral Darwiski prepared to open the battle in the Baltic Sea itself as far from the mouth of the Gulf of Riga as he could get before encountering the German fleet.

This decision was made immediately following the receipt of orders from the newly formed government in Petrograd; and when Admiral Darwiski reached a decision he acted promptly.

Orders were flashed from the flagship to other vessels of the fleet — battle cruisers, torpedo boat destroyers and the few Russian submarines that were in the gulf.

There was enthusiasm aboard the Russian fleet when the sailors realized that they were going into action. The Russian sailors had had little to do in the three and more years of war — what fighting Russia had done had been on land, so no wonder the sailors cheered.

As Lord Hastings, Jack and Frank gazed across the sea from the deck of the British submarine *D-32* the Russian flagship began to move. Gradually she increased her speed until she was steaming at 20 knots. The other ships of the fleet swung into line behind her.

"There they go," said Lord Hastings. "It's about time we had orders."

Even as he spoke the wireless operator approached.

"Message from Admiral Darwiski, sir," he said saluting.

Lord Hastings took the message and read it aloud:

"British submarine fleet will follow Russian battle squadron at distance of two miles. Will not engage enemy until ordered to do so!"

"All right, boys," said Lord Hastings. "We'll be moving."

He gave the wireless operator a message to be relayed to the other British submarines, and then ordered:

"Mr. Templeton! Mr. Chadwick! Follow me below!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE BATTLE BEGINS

THROUGH the blackness of the night the Russian fleet, followed closely by the British submarine flotilla, steamed to meet the enemy. The fleet passed out of the Gulf of Riga and into the broader expanse of the Baltic Sea.

There was scarcely a sound to break the stillness of the night. Occasionally a shouted command carried across the water or there was the sound of a whistle. Otherwise there was no sound to indicate a human presence aboard the ships.

Few lights showed aboard the vessels that comprised the squadron. Each ship carried a light aft, this to make her visible to the vessel immediately behind, but there were no lights shown forward. The huge searchlights, ready to flash upon the foe at a moment's notice, were still blinded. Admiral Darwiski was determined to approach close to the enemy before being discovered.

Aloft, hydroplanes — the real pilots of the fleet

— hovered, darting forward at irregular intervals in an endeavor to pick up the enemy's fleet in the distance and to ward off, if possible, air scouts of the foe.

The Russian fleet steamed forward in single file. This formation would be broken at the moment the enemy was sighted and Admiral Darwiski would order his vessels spread out fanwise, but for the time being he deemed single formation advisable. The distance between the various ships was perhaps two hundred yards.

But in spite of the silence aboard the vessels that comprised the fleet, all was activity until after midnight. Men were given final instructions by their officers; guns were being overhauled, as were the ships' engines, ammunition was being looked after and all other precautions were taken.

But at midnight, upon a signal from the flagship, all the men except those making up the watches, were allowed to turn in. Admiral Darwiski knew that they needed what little rest they could get before the battle opened; there would be no time for aught but work then.

Aboard the British submarines, which followed in the wake of the Russian battle fleet, there was even more activity. Officers and men alike remained on

the alert through the long hours of the night. In spite of the fact that the various commanders had given permission to the crews to turn in, there was no thought of sleep in the British tars; all were too eager for the fray to spend moments in sleep and they appeared to fear that if they closed their eyes for a single instant they would miss something.

Lord Hastings, Frank and Jack spent the early hours in comparing the relative strength of the opposing fleets as nearly as they could be compared without absolutely accurate knowledge of the number of German ships that were advancing to meet the Russians. The number of German ships in the Baltic up to that time was, of course, known to the British and naval authorities, but these had no means of knowing whether the enemy had been reinforced by additional units from beyond the Kiel canal.

"We shall be outnumbered, of course," said Lord Hastings, "and, I am afraid, out-generaled, too."

"What makes you think that, sir?" asked Frank.

Lord Hastings threw his arms wide in a significant gesture.

"The Russian naval staff," he said, "has never been noted for any too great genius or ability. I am in hopes that Admiral Darwiski will prove the

exception, but I am doubtful. The very fact that he has ordered our submarines to keep out of the battle until he has tested the enemy himself is a bad example, to my way of thinking."

"Seems to me we should all attack together, sir," declared Jack. "Put an end to the enemy at once, if possible."

"Exactly," said Lord Hastings. "Trouble is, Admiral Darwiski seems to want the glory of doing the job single-handed if he can."

"And the chances are he won't be able to," declared Frank.

"Exactly," said Lord Hastings again. "It seems that the Russian navy hasn't had much experience with the Germans. Admiral Darwiski isn't over-confident, I believe; but he doesn't realize, apparently, as we do, that the Germans are foemen worthy of the best he has to offer."

"No, sir," said Frank, "and we have learned it through sad experience."

"Well," said Jack, "all we can do is hope for the best."

"Right," said Frank. "Now let's have another look at your figures, sir." This to Lord Hastings.

The British commander passed a slip of paper to Frank. On this he had listed, as nearly accurately

as possible, the complexion of the opposing forces. Frank scanned the paper closely.

"Hm-m-m," he said, "we are more heavily outnumbered than I had supposed, according to this, sir."

"And it may be even worse," said Lord Hastings dryly. "That's why I contend that Admiral Darwiski should order us into action at the same time the main fleet offers battle."

Again Frank scanned the slip of paper.

"Two dreadnoughts — the *Essen* and the *Hamburg* —," he muttered. "Each of 26,000 tons; ten battle cruisers — *Bleinheim*, *Hapsburg*, *Bismarck*, *Wilhelm II*, *Kaiserin*, *Vaderland*, *Grossen*, *Luxemburg*, *Baden* and *Bremen* — four of 16,000 tons and the other six of 14,000 tons. Also eighteen torpedo boat destroyers, half a dozen mine sweepers and a flotilla of submarines."

"Pretty formidable battle fleet," was Jack's comment.

"Rather," agreed Frank, and turned his attention again to the names of vessels that comprised the Russian squadron.

"One dreadnought, the *Cossack*, Admiral Darwiski's flagship," he muttered, "of 24,000 tons; six battle cruisers — *Nicholas*, *Moscow*, *Alexis*, *Fred-*

erick, Alexander and the *Leipsic*, all of 13,000 tons burden. Also twenty torpedo boat destroyers and three or four ancient submarines."

"Add to those," said Jack, "the British submarine flotilla of eleven. That make it a little better."

"Still the odds are heavily against us," said Lord Hastings. "It is true that we are better equipped with torpedo boat destroyers, and that may help considerably; but in the matter of warships the enemy has all the best of the bargain. Neither do we know the strength of his submarine flotilla. It may be greater or less than ours."

"We shall have to wait and see, sir," said Frank quietly.

"That's all we can do," Lord Hastings agreed. "But come, don't you boys want to turn in for a couple of hours? I'll stand watch."

"No sleep for me, sir," said Frank. "We are likely to sight the enemy at almost any time now, and I want to be up when we do."

"There will be nothing you can do for some time after the battle begins, remember," said Lord Hastings.

"Nevertheless," said Jack, "I am of Frank's opinion, sir."

"Suit yourselves," said Lord Hastings with a laugh. "So long as you both wish to remain up, though, I shall turn in awhile myself. I am not as young as I used to be, you know. I wish to be fresh when the battle begins. Call me when we have sighted the enemy."

Lord Hastings crossed his cabin, in which this conversation had taken place, and threw himself, fully dressed, upon his bunk. Frank and Jack left the cabin quietly.

Far ahead now, a Russian hydroplane came dashing back toward the flagship. After hovering above the ship a moment, it fluttered down to the deck. The pilot scrambled out and ran aft toward where Admiral Darwiski paced the bridge.

"German battle fleet approaching three miles west, sir," he reported.

Admiral Darwiski wheeled upon Captain Blue-roff, commander of the flagship, with a sharp command.

Instantly all became action aboard the flagship. Men were piped hurriedly to quarters in the darkness and the wireless aboard the flagship flashed the approach of the enemy to others of the fleet. These ships, too, came to life as though by magic.

Hydroplanes again ascended and dashed forward. Apparently the Germans had not yet discovered the approach of the Russians, and Admiral Darwiski was trying to conceal his movements as long as possible. The air fighters were sent aloft to engage the enemy's air craft and to push them back if possible before they could obtain a view of the Russian fleet. In the darkness, the admiral believed, the Russians would be unable to tell whether the Russian aircraft were a few that had ventured from land or whether they signaled the approach of a battle squadron. He was in hopes that the Germans would hold to the former belief.

And this, in fact, is what happened.

Word of the approach of the Germans was flashed to the British submarines along with the Russian vessels. Frank quickly aroused Lord Hastings, who jumped up. He went on deck, followed by Jack and Frank.

"We'll go along until we get further orders," said Lord Hastings. "Meantime there is no need to submerge."

This order was flashed to the other British vessels.

Meanwhile the Russian ships were closing in

around the flagship. This took time, and when Admiral Darwiski at last had his fleet in battle formation, the German ships had drawn close.

Aloft it had become so warm for the Russian air pilots that they had been forced to return to the protection of their ships. The Germans, pursuing, discovered the Russian battle fleet. Immediately they hurried back to their own fleet to report.

But the advantage for the moment was with the Russians. Admiral Darwiski's air pilots had brought back the range. Suddenly the flagship quivered beneath a shock.

"Boom!"

A forward gun aboard the flagship *Cossack* spoke. Admiral Darwiski had opened the battle.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BATTLE RAGES

THE hour was after four, but it was still dark.

The first Russian shell struck close to the cruiser *Bremen* almost at the same moment the German air pilot dropped to the deck of the German flagship.

At the same time, brilliant streams of light made the German fleet as visible as though it were daylight. The Russian searchlights had been brought into play.

All was confusion aboard the German fleet, which was not yet in true battle formation. Steaming to surprise the Russian fleet in the Gulf of Riga, the Germans themselves had been surprised by the quick dash of the Russian fleet into the Baltic.

Nevertheless, Admiral Klepstein was a capable officer and soon brought order out of chaos that for a moment threatened to break the morale of the German sailors.

Orders were flashed rapidly to the units comprising the German fleet. Gradually the battle

squadron took on the semblance of order in the darkness, now made brilliant by the glare of the Russian searchlights.

Searchlights aboard the German craft now were unleashed and flashed ahead in an endeavor to pick up the Russians. This was impossible because of the blinding glare from ahead, but it served nevertheless to interfere with the range finding of the Russians.

Now the heavy guns aboard the vessels of both fleets began to speak with almost monotonous regularity. Gunners were firing by guesswork rather than by aim. Because of the brilliant glares that blinded the men of both fleets, the work of the range finders went for naught.

Airplanes again ascended from both fleets in an effort to rise above the blinding rays and get the enemy's range as the ships of both fleets maneuvered. These air craft met in midair and there battled among themselves.

A Russian hydroplane was the first to fall, its pilot pierced by a German bullet. The Russians made up for this a moment later, however, with interest, for two German 'planes were sent down in almost as many seconds.

But the hydroplanes were not carried aboard the

ships of war to battle in the air. They were there for scouting purposes, so the pilots, instead of battling for supremacy above, wheeled about and returned to the respective ships.

Gradually it grew light and with the light the searchlights were extinguished. They had served their purpose and there was no more work for them.

The lifting of darkness showed that the opposing fleets had approached within less than a mile of each other. A cheer broke from the Russian sailors, for a German battle cruiser was seen staggering off to port. A Russian shell, aimed at random, apparently had found its mark. So far, however, no Russian ship had been so much as touched.

But now that darkness had fled before the coming day, the work of the gunners was simplified. So close were the two fleets that there was little for the range finders to do. The great guns were brought to bear on the enemy and they were kept at almost white heat so rapid was the firing.

The Germans, from the first, concentrated their fire on the Russian flagship, and after an hour of fighting, the forward turret on the *Cossack* leaped suddenly into the air. The sound of an explosion carried to the other vessels of the fleet.

Men were hurled into the air by the force of the

blast. Some came down in the sea, while others, maimed and wounded unto death, were hurled back on deck.

This was the first telling shot the Germans had fired.

Sailors sprang out on the Russian dreadnought and cleared away the wreckage while the Germans continued to pound away at her. The forward turret on the port side continued to return the enemy's fire.

Under cover of the guns of the dreadnoughts and battle cruisers of the opposing fleets, the torpedo boat destroyers had dashed forward and now were engaged at close quarters. First blood in the fighting between the smaller vessels went to the Russians.

A German torpedo boat destroyer suddenly blew up with a loud noise. A moment, it seemed, and she disappeared beneath the water while the Russians, still working at their guns, cheered wildly.

But this cheering was short lived. Two Russian torpedo boats received death blows almost simultaneously. They sank slowly, the crews manning the guns while the vessels settled to the water's edge. Then, at the last moment, they leaped into the sea and struck out for other vessels with pow-

erful strokes. Most reached safety, but some drowned or were killed as German ships turned their guns upon them as they swam helplessly about.

It was an act of barbarism and there were many German sailors, even, who shrank from obeying the commands of their officers. Aboard the Russian fleet, this act was greeted with furious cries of anger and for a moment the Russians seemed to redouble their fire.

The second forward turret aboard the *Cossack*, the Russian flagship, now had been silenced; her superstructure had been shot away. A shell from a German cruiser to starboard had carried away her steering apparatus and other shells had pierced her engine room.

It was perfectly plain to Admiral Darwiski that the *Cossack* would not float much longer. Nevertheless he still pressed toward the foe.

Suddenly there was a terrific explosion and the ship careened crazily and listed heavily to port. Instantly Admiral Darwiski ordered the boats lowered. A few moments later he was in a small launch and making rapidly for the cruiser *Frederick*, which he reached in safety despite the shells hurled at the little boat by the foe.

The admiral's flag was run up on the *Frederick*

and the battle continued as before. A few moments later the *Cossack* sank.

One of the German dreadnoughts, the *Hamburg*, now was staggering. Russians shells had raked her fore and aft, and it seemed that she could not float long. The German flagship, the *Essen*, stood by to lend what assistance she could, and while her guns became momentarily silent, a Russian shell pierced her vitals. There was an explosion that could be heard above the din of battle. The Russian sailors cheered again and again poured shells into her.

So true was the Russians' aim that the *Essen*, pierced through and through in dozens of places, seemed to split suddenly in half. Hastily the German admiral followed the example of the Russian commander, put off from the flagship and sought safety on another vessel — the cruiser *Bismarck*.

A moment later the dreadnought *Hamburg* sank.

Victory thus far was with the Russians. True they had lost their single dreadnought, but they had disposed of the enemy's two greatest fighting machines.

All this time the fleets, maneuvering for advantage, had drawn closer together. The destroyers were fighting almost deck to deck. Ever and anon

one of these smaller vessels disappeared beneath the sea to rise no more.

Hardly a ship in either fleet that had not been badly damaged, but so far the Russian admiral had not seen fit to call upon the British submarines for assistance. The German submarines, also known to be with the German fleet, for some unaccountable reason had not seen fit to take a hand in the struggle. Still, it became apparent now that it was only a question of time until the undersea craft were called upon.

Suddenly two more violent explosions arose above the sounds of battle. German shells almost simultaneously had pierced the boilers of the Russian cruisers *Leipsic* and *Alexander*.

It was the end for these cruisers. They fought back as best they could, but within a few minutes they disappeared, their crews jumping into the sea as they went down.

With the advantage on his side now, the German admiral signaled his fleet to advance more swiftly; and as the German ships pressed forward, Admiral Darwiski gave the signal to retire.

Slowly the Russian fleet put about, fighting as it did so. One more cruiser, the *Nicholas*, Admiral

Darwiski lost in this maneuver, and two destroyers, but as the Russians turned tail to the enemy, their aft batteries continued the battle.

With victory apparently within his grasp, the German admiral urged his ships to further effort and they sped after the Russians.

Then the moment for which Frank and Jack had been anxiously awaiting came.

The wireless aboard the *D-32* broke into action. The operator rushed to Lord Hastings.

"Orders to advance, sir!" he cried.

"Very well," said Lord Hastings quietly.

The other British submarines had picked up the message at the same time. While still above water, Lord Hastings signaled the other British vessels, "Follow me!" and went below, Jack and Frank at his heels.

Lord Hastings took his place at the periscope. Frank went to the torpedo room. Jack would run the ship.

"Submerge!" commanded Lord Hastings.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GERMANS RETIRE

WHAT remained of the Russian fleet was retiring slowly as the British submarines submerged and moved forward. So far the presence of these undersea vessels was unknown to the Germans and they advanced, confident that they would be able to strike a heavy blow before they were seen.

The periscopes of the eleven vessels, moving forward at distances of not more than a hundred yards apart, were small marks indeed for the German gunners, and yet to such a high degree of efficiency had the Germans obtained, that it required seldom more than a shot or two to dispose even of a submarine with nothing but a small periscope at which to aim.

Therefore, while the British advanced confidently enough, they also advanced cautiously.

The submarines sped close under the Russian ships, now retiring, as they moved against the enemy. Eyes were strained over the side to catch a glimpse of them as they darted forward. The Germans, unmindful of any danger that might lurk

beneath the surface of the sea, steamed in pursuit of the Russians with the calm assurance that what remained of Admiral Darwiski's fleet would either be sunk or would be forced to surrender.

Therefore the *D-32*, which was showing the way to the other British submarines, was able to come into position and launch her first torpedo without being discovered.

The little vessel was not more than three hundred yards from the German cruiser *Kaiserin* when Jack gave the command to fire.

Lord Hastings, with his eye to the periscope, saw the cruiser leap into flames as the torpedo penetrated clear through the ship to her magazine. The force of the explosion that followed churned the water into mighty waves, and where a moment before had steamed a giant battle cruiser, there remained nothing now.

Alarmed by the suddenness of this new attack, the German admiral gave the signal to reduce speed while he sought out these new foes and made an end of them.

The German submarine flotilla, which followed in the wake of the main fleet, now received orders to advance and the undersea vessels sped forward without hesitancy.

But before they could come into action, others of the British submarines had launched torpedoes with deadly execution. Five torpedo boats struck in vital places soon sank.

The big guns on the German ships now were firing desperately at the periscopes which showed above the water. Two were struck and disappeared. Shells, which lost some of their force as they penetrated the water, still did considerable damage. Half an hour after the submarines went into action, three British submarines had been sunk by shells and two had been rammed. This left but six to continue the struggle.

The main Russian fleet, meanwhile, or what was left of it, was making full speed for the Gulf of Riga and the protection of the mine fields and land batteries. The British submarines were left to fight the Germans alone.

An unequal combat like this could have but one result and Lord Hastings knew it. He would have ordered the other submarines to fall back but for the fact that it would be necessary to come to the surface to give the signal. To do that, he realized, would have been to court destruction.

Nevertheless, he knew that commanders of the other vessels were undoubtedly watching the peri-

scope of the *D-32* and probably would follow whatever maneuvers he made.

Therefore Lord Hastings gave the order to come about at almost the same moment that the German submarines approached.

The *D-32* came about slowly, German gunners the while trying to shoot away her periscope and to reach her vitals through the shield of water above. But Jack maneuvered the ship so cleverly that no shell struck home.

There was little to be feared from the German submarines unless they came to the surface and thus tried to dispose of the British undersea craft. Lord Hastings did not believe they would do this, for to do so would have been to expose themselves to British torpedoes. There was little likelihood that a torpedo aimed and fired from beneath the water would do much execution.

As Lord Hastings had expected, when the *D-32* came about and headed back toward the Gulf of Riga, the other five British craft did likewise. But this maneuver was fatal to two more, for German shells reached them and they went down to rise no more. So now there were but four British submarines left.

Lord Hastings gave the command for full speed

ahead, and the *D-32* made off toward safety. But even as she did so there was a sudden shock, and the sight of what was going on above was blotted out. Lord Hastings stepped back.

"What's the matter, sir?" asked Jack anxiously.

"Periscope shot away," said Lord Hastings briefly. "Submerge to ten fathoms, Mr. Templeton."

Jack gave the necessary command and soon the *D-32* was out of reach of German shells, the water at that distance forming an impenetrable shield above them.

Frank came running in from the torpedo room. Lord Hastings explained the situation to him, and added:

"We're out of the fight. We were not equipped with extra periscopes. The thing to do now is to get as far as possible from the Germans above, then come to the surface and seek safety."

"Very good, sir," said Frank.

"Shape your course due west, Mr. Templeton," said Lord Hastings, "and proceed at 10 knots. We don't want to take any chances," he explained his reason for this slow speed. "My chart may be all right, and it may not. It's best to play safe."

For two hours the *D-32* proceeded slowly be-

neath the sea. Below there was no means of telling the outcome of the battle above — whether the German fleet was pursuing the Russians or whether it had had enough and drawn off; whether all the other British submarines had been sunk, or how many survived. The *D-32* was blind and blind she would be until she came to the surface.

After two hours of running beneath the surface, Lord Hastings gave the command to rise to the surface.

“We should be safe enough here,” he said.

Slowly the water was forced from the tanks and the submarine moved toward the surface. Then the even movement of the boat told those inside that they were upon the surface at last.

Lord Hastings sprang up the companionway, threw open the door of the conning tower and stepped on deck; and as Frank and Jack would have followed him, he leaped suddenly back again, almost knocking the lads down, and cried:

“Submerge!”

Hastily Jack gave the order. The submarine settled quickly, but not until it had reached ten fathoms did Jack ask the cause of the trouble.

“What’s the matter, sir?” he said then.

“Matter,” said Lord Hastings, dryly, “is that

we came up in the very midst of the German fleet."

"But —" began Frank.

"Oh, I know what you would say," said Lord Hastings. "But the fleet is there and that's all there is about it."

"How do you account for that, sir?" asked Jack.

"Simple," was Lord Hastings' reply. "The Germans are retiring. They have given up pursuit of the Russians, so great have been their losses, and are returning to port for repairs."

"By Jove, sir," said Jack. "I guess that's it."

"That means," said Frank, "that while the Russians were undeniably licked, the Germans have nothing to crow over."

"Exactly," replied Lord Hastings. "Admiral Darwiski did a better job than I thought he would. To tell the truth, while I didn't say so, I was fearful that the entire Russian fleet, British submarines and all would be destroyed. However, the thing for us to do now is to go back to Riga and report ourselves to the admiral."

"Guess you're right, sir," said Jack.

At Lord Hastings' command he gave the order that brought the *D-32* about and soon the submarine was heading back toward the Gulf of Riga.

Two hours later, feeling sure that they were now so far from the course of the German fleet that there was no chance of discovery, Lord Hastings ordered the vessel brought to the surface. Then he went on deck, with Frank and Jack.

There was nothing to be seen save a streak of smoke toward the west.

"There goes the German fleet, sir," said Jack.

"What's left of it, rather," said Frank.

Lord Hastings nodded.

"And the rest of it is around here some place," he said, "together with the bulk of the Russian ships that gave it battle. To tell the truth, we're fortunate to be on the surface and not beneath the sea ourselves. But now, the thing is to get back to Riga."

"And after that, sir?" questioned Jack.

Lord Hastings shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows?" was his reply.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GERMANS LAND IN FINLAND

IT was the following morning when the British submarine *D-32* crept into the harbor at Riga. There, looking across the water, Lord Hastings and his two officers made out what was left of the Russian fleet riding at anchor.

Half an hour later Lord Hastings, accompanied by Jack and Frank, went aboard the vessel now being used by Admiral Darwiski as his flagship. The Russian admiral expressed his pleasure at seeing them alive.

"I was afraid you had been lost," he said grasping Lord Hastings' hand.

"We came pretty close to it," said Lord Hastings, "but we were fortunate enough to escape. Tell me, have other British submarines returned?"

Admiral Darwiski shook his head slowly.

"I have seen nothing of them," he said. "But I want to say to you, sir, that had it not been for the gallant action of you few English, the entire Russian fleet would either have been sent to the

bottom or I would have been forced to surrender."

"Thanks," said Lord Hastings with sarcasm that was lost upon the admiral. "The fact is I expected when we went into action that you would lend us a hand."

"I couldn't," exclaimed Admiral Darwiski hastily. "My ships, all that remained afloat, were all but sinking. My guns were mostly out of commission. There was nothing I could do."

"Oh, it's all right, sir," said Lord Hastings. "We are glad to have been of assistance, even though some of my brave companions sleep in a watery grave to-night. You will permit me to say, though, that had you allowed us to go into action with you, the result might have been different."

The Russian admiral flushed.

"It may be so," he returned quietly. "No man can say what might have happened. I know we were defeated, but we inflicted a severe blow upon the enemy."

"Have you taken account of your losses?" asked Lord Hastings.

"Yes. Ten torpedo boat destroyers sunk; also the cruisers *Moscow*, *Nicholas*, *Leipsic* and *Alexander*, besides the dreadnought *Cossack*, my flagship, and two Russian and ten British submarines.

I had counted it eleven British submarines until your return."

"And the number of men?" asked Lord Hastings.

"Dead and missing," said Admiral Darwiski, "about eight hundred."

"And have you calculated the enemy's losses?" asked Lord Hastings.

"Yes, and they are severe — even more so than ours. Dreadnoughts *Essen* and *Hamburg* sunk; also the cruisers *Bremen*, *Bismarck*, *Kaiserin* and *Baden*. In addition to these, seven or eight torpedo boats and possibly a few submarines. The number of casualties, of course, I cannot estimate."

"I can't see," said Lord Hastings, "where the Germans can count yesterday's work a victory."

"Nevertheless they will," said Admiral Darwiski. "The Germans count everything a victory — that is, in the accounts they give the people. Admiralty officials, of course, know better."

"The people will take a hand some day," said Lord Hastings, "and when they do —"

He was interrupted by the entrance of a minor officer, who saluted Admiral Darwiski and handed him a document. With a bow to Lord Hastings, the admiral opened the paper and read. He frowned

slightly, motioned the officer he might go and then spoke again to Lord Hastings.

"More trouble," he said quietly. "Admiralty reports Germans are preparing to land troops in Finland. Small German fleet and transports in the Gulf of Finland now. The admiralty wishes to know whether my fleet is in shape to go to the support of the small squadron we have in the Gulf of Finland."

"And it is not, of course?" questioned Lord Hastings.

"Indeed it is not. I have not a ship for action until they have been in drydock for repairs."

"It is indeed too bad," said Lord Hastings. "The Germans certainly seem to be making the most of the dissension in Russia. I suppose they hope to overrun Finland, stir up the people there and turn them against Russia."

"That is undoubtedly their aim," replied Admiral Darwiski. "And here I sit powerless to prevent it."

Lord Hastings considered for some moments. Then he said:

"There is, of course, nothing I can do, but I have a mind to have a look at the situation there. It is quite possible I may be able to obtain information

of value. Now, my submarine is in need of slight repairs? I wonder if you will not give command that it be repaired promptly."

"I shall be delighted," replied Admiral Darwiski. "The work shall be completed by to-morrow by nightfall. In the meantime, it will give me pleasure to have you and your officers remain here with me. Your men, perhaps, will be glad of an opportunity to stretch their legs ashore."

"Thanks, your excellency," said Lord Hastings, "I shall be glad to avail myself of your hospitality."

Thus it was arranged. The crew of the *D-32* were granted shore leave, and Lord Hastings, Frank and Jack spent the night aboard Admiral Darwiski's flagship.

True to his promise, the admiral had the *D-32* fit for service again the following day. The crew went aboard before dark, and the officers followed a short time later.

"I suppose we are on a fool's errand," said Lord Hastings, as he gave command to put to sea, "but we might just as well be in the Gulf of Finland as in the Gulf of Riga, to my way of thinking."

"I certainly agree with you, sir," declared Jack. "We seem to have done all we can here. It hasn't helped much, perhaps but the time will come when

the Russians will appreciate having England for a friend."

"You're right, my boy," said Lord Hastings warmly. "They don't seem to think a whole lot of us right now, even though we are their allies, and that's the truth."

"Do you suppose Russia will ever again be a factor in the war?" asked Frank.

"It's hard to say," was his commander's reply. "It wouldn't surprise me very much to see one of these factions here obtain the upper hand and make representations to Germany for a separate peace."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Jack. "Do you think it will come to that?"

"I said I wouldn't be surprised. At the same time, I don't believe Russia will be foolish enough to trust the kaiser or his agents. Still, it might really be a blessing to the allied cause, if Russia opened her gates to Germany."

"How do you mean, sir?" asked Jack in some surprise.

"Well," said Lord Hastings with a smile, "events are likely to show that Russia as an enemy is better than Russia as a friend. I mean by that, that when you have an enemy you know you have him, but

when you have a friend like Russia you don't really know whether you have a friend or not."

"I see, sir," said Jack. "I hadn't thought of it that way. At the same time, if Russia makes peace, it will release many German troops now on the eastern front."

"Not so many as you might think, perhaps," said Lord Hastings with a smile. "The kaiser will trust Russia no more than Russia will trust the kaiser. No man can say to-day what Russia is likely to do to-morrow. Russia is swept by discontent. The socialists are gaining the upper hand. Who knows that the revolution that is sweeping Russia may not spread to Germany? The kaiser will take no chance on that. No, I believe Germany will keep her armies on the Russian front, even if peace with Russia is made."

"Well, maybe so, sir," said Jack, smiling. "I hope so, at any rate. Another million or so men on the west front right now might hurt a whole lot."

"Then let's hope they don't get there," said Frank.

No evidence of prowling German warships was seen the following day as the submarine, moving upon the surface, continued its way to the Gulf

of Finland. Lord Hastings spent most of the time looking over the chart of the gulf and familiarizing himself with the mine fields and other obstructions laid by the Russians to keep out the foe. These mines, for the most part, had been destroyed by German mine sweepers, but as it was impossible for Lord Hastings to tell which had been destroyed, he wanted to be familiar with all of them.

It was late in the evening when the *D-32* approached the entrance to the gulf.

"We'll have to be careful now," said Lord Hastings to Frank and Jack. "No telling how many of these German vessels may be lying around here. We can take no chances. We'll submerge at the first sign of danger."

No signs of danger presented themselves that night, but at Lord Hastings' command, the submarine stood off from shore during the night. The following morning the voyage toward shore was continued.

Shortly before noon smoke became visible. As the submarine approached closer, Frank, who held the deck at that time, made out that the smoke came from a score or more ships, laying close in shore, some distance away. He called Lord Hastings.

"Germans all right," said Lord Hastings after a look through his glass. "We'll stand off here unless we are discovered, in which event we'll submerge."

CHAPTER XX

A LANDING PARTY

ALL during the afternoon either Lord Hastings, Jack or Frank stood watch on deck, for Lord Hastings did not want to be surprised by one of the enemy. The day passed slowly, but with the coming of night Lord Hastings decided upon a bold stroke in an effort to make out the size of the force the Germans had landed in Finland.

"We'll go ashore after dark," he confided to the two lads.

"Fine!" said Frank. "I like these expeditions ashore. It breaks the monotony of seafaring life."

"You should have joined the army instead of the navy," declared Jack.

"Oh, no," said Frank, "I wouldn't care for that life as a regular diet; but occasionally it is all right. What time shall we go ashore, sir?" This to Lord Hastings.

"As soon as it is dark enough to make sure that we shall not be discovered," returned the com-

mander of the *D-32*. "By the way, I believe we had better discard these uniforms. It might be necessary for us to mingle with the people and we could hardly do that, under the circumstances, as British naval officers."

This plan was put into execution. At 8 o'clock the submarine's launch was floated alongside and the three clambered in, followed by as many sailors, one of whom, Taggart, Lord Hastings put in command of the boat during their absence.

"You will wait here for us until daylight if necessary, Taggart," Lord Hastings said after they had stepped ashore. "We may be back before then and we may not. If we are not here by daylight, you will return to the submarine and stand by for two days, submerging only when necessary. If we have not returned then, you will wait no longer, but make your way home as best you can."

"Very good, sir," said Taggart touching his cap.

Lord Hastings, Jack and Frank strode away in the darkness.

"It may be lucky for Taggart that he knows something of navigation," said Lord Hastings as they walked along.

"Why, sir," demanded Jack.

"Well," said Lord Hastings, "if we don't return and Taggart knew nothing of navigation he'd be in rather a ticklish situation. He'd have a boat and he might be able to run it, but he wouldn't know where he was going."

The commander of the *D-32* and his two young officers made their way inland at a rapid walk. At this particular point, the great trees that lined the shore came almost to the water's edge. The night was very dark and Lord Hastings had no fear of being discovered.

"The only danger," he said, "is that somebody may come upon us suddenly in the darkness. But if we hear footsteps approaching, we'll hide in among the trees."

But they traversed the first mile and encountered no one.

"Great Scott!" said Jack. "Seems to me that we should be there by this time."

"Be where?" demanded Frank.

"Why, wherever we are going," replied Jack. "I don't know where that is."

"We are going," said Lord Hastings, "to have a look at those ships we saw from the distance and to learn whether Germans have really effected a landing in Finland."

"Weren't there Russian troops stationed here, sir?" asked Jack.

"I suppose so. At least there should have been. But it would appear that the disaffection in the capital has spread to the army in Finland. I feel sure that the Germans have landed and are preparing to march inland."

"Well, what are we going to do about it, sir?" asked Frank.

"There is nothing we can do, so far as I see," said Lord Hastings, "except take back to England word that the Germans have really landed in Finland."

"How does the population of Finland stand on this war, sir?" asked Frank.

"The bulk of Finland," said Lord Hastings, "is supposed to have espoused the allied cause. Nevertheless, there are those in the country who profess to believe that Russia is their natural enemy and that an enemy of Russia is therefore Finland's friend. At least, that was the situation at the outbreak of the war. I don't know what the sentiment is now."

They continued their walk in silence. Perhaps half an hour later Lord Hastings, who was walking slightly ahead, stopped suddenly and raised a warning hand. Neither of the lads could see the

warning gesture so dark was the night, but they halted when Lord Hastings did nevertheless.

"What is it, sir?" asked Frank in a low voice.

"Looks like we have come to the town, whatever it is," said Lord Hastings. "As a matter of fact, though, according to my maps, we should not have reached the town for an hour yet."

Maybe you have miscalculated, sir," said Jack.

"It looks that way," was Lord Hastings' reply.

"See any Germans, sir?" asked Jack, peering over his commander's shoulder.

"Not a German," said Lord Hastings, "nor any one else for that matter. We seem to be in the edge of the town."

"Had we not better go on, sir?" asked Frank. "If some one came up from behind and saw us standing here like this he might raise a yell."

"Right you are, Frank," agreed Lord Hastings. "We'll proceed."

The three moved forward again and presently lights began to appear and the soft earth of the country gave way to hard streets and at length they came to a sidewalk.

"Well, it's a city, at all events," said Lord Hastings.

"What's the name of it, sir?"

"Where's your geography?" asked Lord Hastings. "Reval, of course."

As they walked along they passed several figures going in the opposite direction, but they were not accosted.

"Strange we don't see some of the military, either German or Russian," muttered Lord Hastings.

"If the Germans are indeed here, there is not much likelihood of seeing a Russian soldier, sir," said Jack.

"Right you are," agreed Frank. "And if the Germans are indeed here, they are not looking for trouble from the rear, sir. They're leaving it to their warships to protect them, I guess."

"I suppose that's about the size of it," said Lord Hastings.

Presently they turned a corner and an illuminated square appeared ahead.

"Hello! We seem to be coming some place," was Lord Hastings' exclamation.

Ahead a large crowd was gathered. Lord Hastings, Frank and Jack approached without appearance of haste and attracted no attention. In the center of the crowd on the sidewalk, mounted

upon a large box, was a brilliantly uniformed German officer. He was addressing the crowd and the people were listening intently.

"We have come," said the German, "to free Finland from Russian oppression. For years you have been trying to throw off the yoke of the czar, and at last we have come to help you. In your harbor you see a German fleet. In your city are German soldiers. Already a hundred thousand men have passed through here and more will follow."

"Phew!" said Jack to Lord Hastings. "A hundred thousand, he said."

"Undoubtedly an exaggeration by which he hopes to influence the crowd," replied Lord Hastings in a low voice.

"One hundred thousand German troops already in Finland to help you throw off the yoke," continued the German officer. "Are you not thankful to the German emperor?"

There were wild cries of "yes!" "yes!" from the crowd.

"And more troops are coming," continued the German. "But in return for this service, the German emperor has a favor to ask—a favor he is sure you will grant if you know he desires it?"

"What is it?" came voices from the crowd.

"In your city," continued the German officer, "are officials who are still loyal to the czar. These men must be punished. The German emperor can of course punish them. But that is not enough. It will not have the same effect as though the people of the city took the punishment into their hands. The German emperor's request is that you inflict this punishment yourselves."

The crowd was greatly excited. There was never a doubt that the people of Finland, believing themselves oppressed by Russian rule, had longed for the opportunity to wreak vengeance on the men who had, they believed, wronged them. Here, it seemed, was the German emperor offering to help them in direct answer to their prayers.

"What shall we do to them?" cried many voices.

"Kill them!" cried a voice.

Again the German officer opened his mouth to speak. But at this point Frank's anger boiled over.

For the moment he forgot where he was; he forgot that before him were nothing but enemies and that he was bringing danger not only upon himself but upon his friends. With a cry of anger, he elbowed his way through the crowd till he was di-

rectly in front of the German officer. Then, stretching forth a hand, he seized the man by the coat and dragged him to the ground. Frank's right fist shot out sharply.

"Take that!" he cried.

Pandemonium broke loose upon the instant.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MOB

JACK and Lord Hastings, too surprised by Frank's action to move for the moment, now charged through the crowd to their friend's rescue; and as Jack elbowed men out of his way, he muttered to himself:

"The fool! Why couldn't he keep that temper of his in check?"

But this was no time for words and Jack knew it. Action was what would count if Frank were to be saved from the hands of the mob. Jack stuck close to Lord Hastings' side.

Frank, after he had struck the German officer, turned immediately to give battle to the mob that closed in on him with angry cries. He realized in an instant that he acted foolishly. His anger subsided as the crowd closed in and he set about protecting himself coolly enough.

The first man to rush at him Frank met with a stiff right arm blow to the mouth and the man staggered back. Frank backed quickly against the im-

provised platform so that the mob could not reach him from behind.

Two or three men sprang upon him together. Frank struck out right and left and for a moment the crowd gave back. But those in front were pressed forward by the eager ones in the rear and Frank was soon battling against heavy odds.

Jack and Lord Hastings were still some distance away, though they were making valiant efforts to reach Frank's side. Frank caught sight of Jack, standing several inches above the heads of others of the crowd, and he smiled to himself as he fought. Jack would be there presently, with Lord Hastings, and then they would show this crowd of Finlanders a few things. Frank felt that he could hold out until his friends reached his side despite the odds against him.

The German officer whom Frank had knocked down had been trampled underfoot by the mob as it charged Frank. The struggling figures above him had at last brought back consciousness and now he struggled to his feet. He was unable for the moment to recall just what had happened, but as Frank's unexpected attack came back to him, he dashed forward with an angry cry.

Shoving men to right and left, the German was

soon in front of Frank. The lad was a good deal smaller in stature than the German and less powerfully built. But what Frank lacked in strength he more than made up in courage and the scientific use of his fists.

The German sprang forward, his arms outstretched, apparently seeking to get Frank by the throat. Frank could retreat no farther because of the fact that his back was against the platform, but he met the German's rush with a stiff right handed blow to the face. The man staggered back, blood streaming down his face. An instant he glared at Frank wrathfully, then with a sudden movement whipped out his revolver.

Frank, up to this time, had made no effort to draw his own weapons. He knew that at the first sound of firearms the crowd would go stark mad; but now that the German officer had made the first move, Frank was forced to act in self-defense.

The lad's hand dropped to his pocket and before the German could press the trigger of his own weapon, Frank had fired through his coat. The German staggered back and his revolver fell clattering to the ground. He clapped a hand to his side and then fell forward on his face.

For a moment the crowd gave back, and in that

moment Lord Hastings and Jack reached Frank's side. Frank now covered the mob with his two automatics. Jack and Lord Hastings each produced two revolvers. The situation was desperate and prompt action was necessary.

"Stand back!" cried Lord Hastings in a loud voice.

The crowd gave way.

"Come," said Lord Hastings, and led the way into the very thick of the crowd. Frank came next and Jack brought up the rear.

Under the frowning muzzles of the six weapons, the crowd opened a path and the three passed through. It seemed, for a moment, that the retreat would be made without further trouble.

But from the distance, attracted by the shots and the sounds of confusion, came half a dozen German officers. The crowd appeared to take heart at these reinforcements. A man some distance back in the mob drew a revolver and fired.

The bullet touched neither of the three friends, but it warned them that if they meant to escape it must be done by force rather than intimidation. There were not now more than a dozen men ahead of the three friends and the open street beyond.

"Charge!" commanded Lord Hastings

With Frank and Jack he went forward at a run. The few men who barred the way skipped nimbly to one side and the way was clear.

"Run!" cried Lord Hastings.

The three took to their heels. At the same moment the German officers pushed through the crowd and sent a fusillade of bullets after the fugitives. None found its mark, but it warned Lord Hastings that the two hundred yards or so to the edge of the city, where they might perhaps find safety among the trees beyond, was fraught with danger. It was necessary to make a stand and fall back more slowly or they would be shot down from behind.

Lord Hastings halted in his tracks and turned his revolvers toward the foe. Frank and Jack did likewise.

"Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!" the revolvers spat out.

Two of the enemy were seen to pitch forward on their faces, but the others, reënforced by the crowd, continued to press ahead.

Now Frank's excellent markmanship came into use. His revolver spat sharply twice and as many men dropped. Jack accounted for another and Lord Hastings for the fourth. The crowd, now

without leaders, halted. Several sharp reports told the three that there were weapons among the crowd, but the possessors of these, it appeared, were poor shots, so no damage was done.

It seemed to Lord Hastings that the moment was safe for a retreat.

"Run!" he cried again, and the three took to their heels.

Behind came cries of anger from the crowd as it dashed forward in pursuit. The mob, seeing its prey about to escape, appeared to have lost all respect for the weapons in the hands of the fugitives.

Lord Hastings, Jack and Frank reached the shelter of the distant trees in safety. Bullets fired after them went wild.

Lord Hastings, who was leading the way, did not slacken his speed as he dashed in among the trees. He was headed straight for the *D-32's* launch and he had no intention of slowing down if he could help it until he reached there.

"Come on!" he cried over his shoulder. "Don't stop!"

Jack and Frank needed no urging.

But there were sprinters among the crowd behind. Try as they would, it seemed that the three friends could not out-distance the mob. This was

due, of course, to the fact that Lord Hastings was not as spry as the two lads. Jack and Frank probably could have shaken off the crowd, but they remained closely behind their commander.

But the fugitives were holding their own. Although they were not gaining on their pursuers, it was apparent that the pursuers were not gaining on them. At this rate they would reach the launch safely, and Jack felt sure that reënforced by the three British sailors, they could beat back the enemies until they were safely at sea.

According to Lord Hastings' calculations they were not more than five hundred yards from the launch now. The British commander was about exhausted, but he ran on doggedly.

But suddenly he tripped over some obstruction in the dark and fell forward on his face. Frank and Jack stopped instantly.

"Is he conscious?" asked Jack anxiously.

Lord Hastings answered this question himself.

"I'm all right," he said, struggling to his feet. "I don't know what that confounded thing was I tripped over. Come on!"

He dashed forward again, Frank and Jack at his heels.

But this pause in the flight had allowed the crowd

to come closer, or some of it, for there were perhaps a dozen men who had out-distanced the others. Whether these were armed, Frank did not know, but he determined upon a bold plan to protect the flight of his friends.

He stopped suddenly and faced his pursuers, both revolvers held low. Before the pursuers could stop, his revolvers spoke sharply three or four times. Two men toppled forward, and the rest drew back.

Frank dashed after his friends.

Suddenly, when it seemed to Lord Hastings that he could run no farther, he came upon the *D-32's* launch in the darkness. The three British sailors, seeing him, dashed forward, rifles in hand. As Frank appeared a short distance behind Jack, they stopped.

"Quick! To the launch, men!" ordered Lord Hastings.

The six dashed for the launch and clambered in. The little craft put off from shore as the crowd dashed into sight.

Several revolvers flashed and bullets skimmed overhead, but no bullet found a human mark. Frank seized a rifle and fired into the crowd, driving it back.

The launch reached the side of the *D-32* safely.

"We'll have to get away from here at once," said Lord Hastings, when he stood on the deck of the submarine. "We'll have every sleepy German warship near after us in a moment. Below! All of you!"

CHAPTER XXII

OLD ENGLAND AGAIN

"FRANK," said Lord Hastings, "you should be courtmartialed."

"What for, sir?" asked Frank in surprise.

The *D-32* was bound north and running submerged.

"What for?" echoed Lord Hastings. "It seems to me you need no answer to that question."

Jack, who was an interested listener, smiled. Frank saw him.

"What are you grinning at?" he demanded. "I suppose you know why I should be courtmartialed, eh?"

"You bet I do," returned Jack.

"Then maybe you'll tell me why."

"I guess you know right enough," said Jack, "but I'll tell you, anyhow. You should be courtmartialed because you acted a fool a short time ago."

"Well, maybe I did," grumbled Frank, "but that German made me mad."

"Which was no reason for losing your temper," said Lord Hastings. "You not only risked all our lives, but, what is worse, you thwarted my plans."

"I didn't mean to do that, sir," protested Frank.

"Oh, I know you didn't," returned Lord Hastings. "Had you meant to thwart my plans, it would have been an act of treason. No, all you did was to lose your temper and get us all in trouble; and I've warned you about that temper of yours a dozen times if I have warned you once."

"I know it, sir," said Frank, his face flushing. "I'm sorry, sir."

"Your being sorry doesn't remedy the situation," continued Lord Hastings severely. "How much depended upon my getting the information I was after I don't know. But at all events you have helped the enemy materially."

"I'll go back now and find out, sir!" exclaimed Frank eagerly.

"No you won't," said Lord Hastings firmly. "You will stay right here where I can keep an eye on you. The next expedition we go on, I shall probably leave you behind."

"You wouldn't do that, sir!" exclaimed Frank, now thoroughly alarmed.

"I haven't fully decided," was his commander's

reply. "I'll be tempted to leave you behind, I know that."

"But I'll promise to be more careful in the future, sir," said Frank anxiously.

"You've said that before."

"I mean it this time, sir."

"We'll see when the time comes," declared Lord Hastings, thus ending the matter and leaving Frank greatly ill at ease.

"Where are we going now, sir?" asked Jack.

"Home," replied Lord Hastings briefly.

"Back to England, sir?"

"Yes."

"But we are not headed toward the Kiel canal, sir," said Frank.

"What of that?" demanded Lord Hastings sharply. "There are other ways of reaching England than going through the Kiel canal. I'll tell you this much. I had my mind made up to go back that way and to launch a few torpedoes at the enemy as we passed, but your action to-night has changed my mind. No; we'll go by a safer route—the northern route, through the Skagerak."

"I see, sir," said Frank, now completely subdued.

The voyage back to England was made without

incident worthy of mention. On a day in early July, the *D-32* docked in Liverpool.

Lord Hastings granted the crew shore leave and with Jack and Frank took train to London. There the lads once more established themselves in Lord Hastings' home, and spent restful days under the motherly influence of Lady Hastings.

Lord Hastings reported immediately to the admiralty, where he went into detail concerning conditions in Russia. He brought first word to the admiralty that German troops had landed in Finland, and as a result of his report Great Britain and France later made representations to the Russian republic to learn just what support the allies could expect in the east in future.

"I am afraid," said Lord Hastings at dinner one night, "that Russia will never strike another blow for the cause of the allies. That man Kerensky, who has set himself up as dictator, seems to be a big man and all that, but he is making the mistake of treating his opponents too easily. Mark my words, it will be only a question of time until he is overthrown and his enemies will have no scruples about putting him to death or throwing him in prison."

As history will show, Lord Hastings was a good prophet.

In spite of Lord Hastings' displeasure with Frank, it was not long until the two lads embarked with their commander upon a new mission.

Returning from the city one afternoon, Lord Hastings summoned Frank and Jack to his study.

"Well, boys," he said, "we have been idle for some time now. It strikes me that we had better be getting busy."

"I've thought that for several days, sir," agreed Frank.

"Same here, sir," declared Jack.

"I'm glad you are ready for business again," said Lord Hastings. "Fact is, I have received orders for active service."

"Where, sir?" cried Frank, jumping to his feet.

"Not so fast, not so fast!" exclaimed Lord Hastings. "I am still in doubt as to whether it will be well to take you with us."

Frank flushed.

"I'll be good, sir," he said, and sat down.

"This voyage," said Lord Hastings, "will carry us into the Adriatic."

"To help the Italians, sir," said Jack.

"Well, maybe," was the reply. "We are not going so much to fight as upon a visit of courtesy.

It appears that it has been so long time since the Italian populace has seen a British soldier, or a British warship that the people have begun to doubt we are still in the war. We're just going to show ourselves, so to speak."

"I can't see where there will be much fun or excitement in that," declared Frank.

"As I have said," declared Lord Hastings, "we are going neither for fun nor excitement. Also, should there perchance be excitement, I'm going to make it a point to see that you are kept out of it."

Lord Hastings took the sting off these words with a slight smile, and Frank grinned back feebly.

"Very well, sir," he said.

"And when do we start, sir?" asked Jack.

"The day after to-morrow," was Lord Hastings' reply.

"Submarine, sir?"

"No. We will go aboard the *Tiger* to-morrow night. I have been put in command."

"I see, sir. How big a crew does she carry, sir?"

"Where are your statistics, my boy?" asked Lord Hastings. "An officer in his majesty's navy should have all such figures at his finger tips."

"I know that, sir," replied Jack, "but I **don't** seem able to remember."

"The *Tiger*," said Lord Hastings, "is a first class battle cruiser of 17,000 tons burden. She carries a complement of 900 men, officers and crew. She is equipped with four batteries of 14-inch guns and as many rapid firers. Also she carries half a dozen 6-inch torpedo tubes."

"Pretty good sized ship, sir," said Frank.

"Rather," agreed Jack.

"And we are to be your first and second officers, I take it, sir," said Frank.

Lord Hasting frowned and seemed to be considering.

"I suppose so," he said at last, "although there was some talk of the ~~present~~ officer ~~staying~~ and not accompanying Commander Eggleston aboard the *Prairie*."

"And if he does stay what is to become of me, sir?" asked Frank, somewhat alarmed.

"Well," said Lord Hastings, "you probably would have to stay home or else serve in a minor capacity."

"Then I'm willing to serve in a minor capacity, sir," said Frank. "I don't want to be left behind, sir."

Jack smiled, for he knew that Lord Hastings was joking.

"Oh, I guess you'll go all right, Frank," he said. Lord Hastings laughed outright.

"Don't worry, Frank," he said, "you shall go as my second officer, of course. I was simply teasing you. But you see what that temper of yours has done? It's ever getting you in hot water. You know that I would be justified in leaving you behind, and you feared that is what I meant to do."

"I know it, sir," said Frank readily, "and I give you my promise that I shall try and keep a curb on it in future."

"The best way to keep a promise," said Hastings "is to make it to yourself."

"By George! You are right, sir," said Frank, "and I shall do that, too."

CHAPTER XXIII

ABOARD THE "TIGER"

VENICE.

It was two weeks after Lord Hastings announced that they were bound for Italian waters that Frank and Jack found themselves in the prettiest of all Italian cities. The grim hand of war had touched but lightly here. The city was filled with uniformed officers and men — soldiers and sailors alike — and it was this only that told the visitor Italy was in war.

Wreckage caused by bombs dropped by Austrian aviators who occasionally flew over Venice was quickly removed after each flight, and but for the uniformed men that passed through the streets, it would have been impossible to tell that Italy was engaged in a struggle for her very existence.

Venice is perhaps the chief seaport of Italy. Standing as it does on the western shore of the Adriatic, it is but a short distance as the crow flies across to the Austrian port of Trieste. It seemed

strange that after almost three years of war neither Venice or Trieste had not been captured by either of the opposing forces; but there they were still — as they had been at the opening of hostilities between Austria and Italy — apparently peaceful and serene.

But each of these cities was protected by its own battle fleet. Close to shore in the port of Trieste, a large Austrian fleet hovered — as it had hovered since the war began. Down toward the mouth of the Adriatic, almost to the Mediterranean, a combined Italian and French fleet stood guard. Thus the Austrian fleet was effectually barred from leaving the shelter of Trieste, but the Italians and French could not go in.

Occasionally either the Italians or Austrians made raids, usually with not more than two or three vessels. Once, in the early stages of the war, the Italians had conducted a successful raid in force. They had delivered a hard blow to the enemy, but they had lost heavily themselves. After this no show of force had been attempted in the Adriatic by either side.

But now the moment had come when the Italian admiralty felt that a blow could be delivered with some degree of success. Italian troops on land had

been pushing the foe back in the mountains and it seemed that the capture of Trieste was imminent. For this reason, it was believed that a successful engagement on sea would have a demoralizing effect upon the enemy.

The Austrian fleet was indeed a formidable one. It was backed by a squadron of submarine vessels second only in effectiveness to the German U-Boats that prowled the seas. Also, Germany had furnished her ally with a number of those great Zeppelins, which, in the early days of the war, the allies had looked upon with dread. True, these monsters of the air had not lived up to their reputation, but the populace of the allied countries had **not** yet altogether lost their fear of them.

These monsters, the Italian admiralty knew, hovered in the upper Adriatic as huge guardians for the Austrian fleet. To engage the enemy's battle fleet, meant to engage the Zeppelins also. Nevertheless, the Italian admiralty decided that the time to strike was at hand.

It seemed that all Venice knew that something was in the air. The secret, of course, was well guarded, for it was possible that the city was filled with Austrian and German spies. Consequently the people did not know just what was about to happen.

The people knew that important events were imminent, but whether Italy was to strike by sea, by air or with her armies in the mountains they could not say.

But after nightfall of a certain day in late July, the people, had they put two and two together, might have gained an inkling of what was about to transpire. Officers and crews of the Italian ships who had been on shore leave were hastily recalled aboard ship. The military was not affected and men in handsome army uniforms were not affected. But the following morning there were few naval men to be seen in the streets. What few there were made haste toward the water front. These were the men who could not be reached with recall orders the night before, or those who had overstayed their leave for some reason or other. Also, there were in evidence a few officers hurrying hither and thither, as their missions took them to various parts of the city.

Frank and Jack had spent the night ashore, seeing something of the city. Now, in the morning, as they made their way toward the water front, the lads were impressed with the fact that there were few seafaring men in sight.

“I wonder why?” said Frank.

"You've got me," declared Jack. "It would seem that all the sailors had been called back aboard, but I haven't any idea why. I should judge, though, that either the admiralty has wind of an impending Austrian sortie, or is figuring upon an attack itself. But we'll go aboard the *Tiger*. We'll find out quick enough."

A small boat took them alongside the *Tiger*, which lay far out in the harbor. The two lads immediately reported to Lord Hastings in his cabin.

"What's up, sir?" asked Jack.

Lord Hastings feigned surprise.

"What's up?" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Why," said Jack, "there is hardly an Italian or French sailor to be seen ashore. Evidently they've all gone aboard their ships. Looks like there was something up, sir."

"Probably their leave has expired," returned Lord Hastings.

Jack shook his head.

"Hardly likely that all leaves would expire at the same time," he said.

Lord Hastings laughed.

"You've keen eyes, both of you," he said.

"You observe quickly, and that is a great thing.

To tell you the truth, there is about to be a battle."

"I surmised as much, sir," said Frank.

"The Austrians are going to attack, sir?" asked Jack.

Lord Hastings shook his head.

"Then it's the Italians, sir," declared Frank.

"Are they going to raid Trieste by sea, sir?"

"They're going to try," said Lord Hastings briefly.

"When, sir?" demanded Jack.

"With the break of day to-morrow," replied Lord Hastings.

"And I suppose we are going along, sir," said Jack.

Lord Hastings smiled.

"You must remember," he said, "that we are not really here as combatants. We are on something of a more delicate mission, as I have explained. It will not be necessary for us to fight."

The faces of both lads fell.

"That's too bad, sir," said Jack quietly.

"Hold on, now," said Lord Hastings. "I said we were not here as combatants, but I didn't say we weren't going along with the Italian fleet."

Frank's face beamed again. So did Jack's.

"That's so, sir," Jack agreed.

"As a mark of courtesy," continued Lord Hastings, "Admiral Givonni has offered the *Tiger* a place in the battle line. I have his message here now. I have not answered it, yet."

"But you will answer affirmatively, will you not, sir?" cried Frank eagerly.

"I had been turning the matter over in my mind when you boys came in," said Lord Hastings. "I've no doubt you would both be glad if I said 'yes.'"

"We would, sir," declared Jack.

"Then I suppose it will have to be 'yes,'" said Lord Hastings.

He turned to his desk and scribbled a moment. Then he passed a slip of paper to Frank.

"Give this to the wireless operator," said Lord Hastings briefly.

Frank left the cabin for the wireless room. As he passed along, he took time to glance at the message. It read like this:

"Admiral Givonni,

"Commanding Italian Fleet:

"I accept for the *Tiger* the position of honor for to-morrow's attack.

"HASTINGS."

"Position of honor," said Frank to himself. "Sounds like we are going to be up in the thick of the fight."

He gave the message to the operator and returned to Lord Hastings' cabin.

"Boys," said Lord Hastings, "this attack will be dangerous. There are minefields and submarines to be passed before we are within striking distance of the enemy, but I have no doubt that we shall be successful."

"Of course we shall, sir," declared Frank.

"We have a busy day ahead of us," continued Lord Hastings. "We shall have to overhaul ship to make sure that everything is ship shape. Frank, you go below and start things moving. Jack, you shall take charge on deck. Be sure and overlook nothing. I shall have you relieved at noon, and you can turn in for the afternoon. I will have all hands on deck for inspection at eight bells to-night."

The lads saluted and departed upon their several errands. Each was very happy. Lord Hastings glanced after them and smiled.

"They're good boys," he told himself quietly.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RAID

A DOZEN and more great shadowy shapes slipped through the darkness. These were the dreadnoughts and battle cruisers that made up the bulk of the Italian fleet steaming forth to engage the Austrians in their own waters. A squadron of torpedo boat destroyers had gone on before, showing the way, to take upon themselves the task of opening the battle and to protect the advance of the larger ships behind.

It was now after dark, and Admiral Givonni had given the signal to steam ahead. It was his plan to be in position to strike when the first light of dawn should show in the east. If his airships and submarines, sent even in advance of the destroyers, should be successful in their work, the Italian fleet would be able to proceed to such a place as to open the battle without being detected by the enemy.

The Italian fleet advanced in battle formation — spread out in a wide semi-circle. In the center of this was the flagship of Admiral Givonni, the *Santa*

Maria Theresa. To the right of the flagship was the French dreadnought, the *Marseilles*, and to the left the British battle cruiser, the *Tiger*.

Farther to the right were half a dozen French cruisers, while the Italian warships were stationed to the left. In this formation, the fleet advanced through the night.

There was silence aboard the fleet. Nothing but the tail lights showed. Overhead, ever and anon, could be heard the creaking of the wings of the hydroplanes, or the purr of their motors. Every ship in the fleet was stripped for action; every man was at his post.

The *Santa Maria Theresa* steamed slightly in advance of its consorts. Admiral Givonni himself was on the bridge. The wireless aboard the various ships worked from time to time, as Admiral Givonni gave new orders.

Midnight came and there had been nothing to stay the advance of the fleet; no enemy had presented himself on the sea, under the sea or overhead. Apparently the attack would be a complete surprise.

At 3 o'clock, feeling that his destroyers, slightly in advance, were close enough to the foe for his purpose, Admiral Givonni ordered them to halt and to spread out to each side, thus making an opening

through which the larger ships of the fleet might pass. This was done, and as dawn broke a few moments later, the main fleet steamed ahead.

In the distance now became visible other great shapes lying low in the water. These were the Austrian battleships, lying some distance out from the harbor. Smoke poured from their funnels. Apparently the Austrian admiral kept steam up, prepared for all eventualities.

Through his glass Admiral Givonni made out activity aboard the enemy. Apparently the advance of the Italian fleet had been noted. A dull boom carried across the water. It was the signal of danger. The Austrians would be ready in a moment to give battle.

Admiral Givonni gave a sharp command.

The forward turret guns of the *Santa Maria Theresa* spoke and the ship quivered beneath them. A moment and the forward guns of the *Tiger* and the *Marseilles* came into play, and then the guns of the other dreadnoughts and battle cruisers.

Swiftly now the Austrian fleet was brought into battle formation, their guns replying to the Allies as they maneuvered into position. Instead of waiting for the enemy to approach closer, the Austrian commander signaled an advance.

The duel of great guns shattered the early day with their terrible voices.

Above, air craft darted from both fleets and met in the open between the two fleets in deadly combat. From behind the Austrians, the shore batteries broke into action, firing over the Austrian fleet at the advancing Italians, British and French. These shore batteries were still out of sight of the Allies, but the sea was so well charted at this point that the first shells hurled from the land batteries struck dangerously close.

Under the protection of these distant batteries, the Austrians advanced, so close, finally, that the land batteries ceased their fire for fear of hitting friend as well as foe. Every movement in the battle was flashed to shore by air craft high above the scene of the sea struggle.

At a signal from Admiral Givonni, the Italian torpedo boats, lying to port and to starboard, now gathered themselves for a dash against the larger vessels of the enemy. They advanced simultaneously, all available guns booming as they did so. So great was their number, that, because perhaps the Austrian admiral had not opportunity properly to maneuver his own vessels, they were upon the enemy — almost beneath his longer ranged guns

—before the Austrians realized their purpose. They poured volley after volley of high explosive shells into the foe.

A battle cruiser to port of the Austrian flagship was the first to succumb before their deadly fire. Raked fore and aft and pierced through and through, it reeled, staggered, sank.

Angered at this success, the Austrian admiral ordered his remaining vessels toward the torpedo boat destroyers at full speed. Two were rammed by the steel prows of the larger ships before they could get out of harm's way. Two others were blown up almost simultaneously, and several more were so badly crippled by shell fire that they drifted helplessly.

The Italian destroyers turned and fled to port and to starboard. Meanwhile, the main allied fleet — the dreadnoughts and battle-cruisers, which had drawn closer under the protection of the destroyers, now poured a veritable rain of steel into the Austrians.

The entire enemy fleet seemed to stagger beneath this shock. The Austrian admiral quickly signaled for reduced speed. The Austrian fleet scattered in a wider semi-circle. Apparently it was the plan of the enemy's commander to surround the allied fleet. From far to the rear dark clouds of smoke signified

the advance of more Austrian vessels coming to reinforce their hard pressed comrades.

It was perfectly clear that the arrival of reinforcements would mean the heavy outnumbering of the attacking party. Therefore, Admiral Givonni determined to press his early advantage, wreak what damage he could on the foe and retreat before he was too closely pressed.

The fire of the flagship, the *Tiger* and the *Marseilles* was centered on the Austrian flagship. Others of the Austrian fleet, Admiral Givonni left to others of his own vessels.

The Austrian flagship fought back gamely enough, but against three adversaries she had little chance indeed.

The *Tiger* put a shell into her forward turret to port, putting the guns out of commission and killing or wounding practically every member of the gun crew. The *Santa Maria Theresa* brought down the enemy's superstructure with two well directed shells, while the *Marseilles* opened two gaps in the enemy's flagship just below the water line.

The Austrian flagship was wounded unto death. She would not float much longer, and her admiral knew it. Nevertheless, he fought back until the *Tiger*, with two shells, put his second forward tur-

ret out of commission. Then the Austrian admiral and his staff took to the small boats and made across the water for the next vessel.

Not a shot was fired at the little boats as they crossed the water. Directly the flag of the admiral was run up on the other ship. The three foremost allied vessels now turned their attention to this.

The Austrian admiral's former flagship sank a few moments later. To port an Austrian cruiser suddenly blew up with a terrible explosion. Two large vessels to starboard sank. Others, mortally wounded, seemed unable to continue the struggle much longer, but fought back nevertheless.

By this time, the Austrian vessels advancing to the relief of their hard-pressed comrades came within range and opened fire. For a few moments the Italians paid no attention to these, directing all their energy to disposing of the vessels directly before them. Two more were sunk, and so far the allies had lost only a few torpedo boats.

Admiral Givonni decided now that he had given the Austrians a much needed lesson and that it would be well to retire before he had incurred further damage himself. He gave the signal to retire.

It was at that moment that a shell struck the bridge aboard the *Tiger*. Great clouds of steel and wood flew high in the air. A splinter, descending, caught Lord Hastings across the face and laid open a long gash. Frank felt himself lifted to his feet and hurled violently to the deck. He picked himself up. He was not badly hurt. Jack also had been knocked unconscious.

Frank bent over his commander and Jack. The latter was the first to regain consciousness. Frank helped him to his feet, and as he did so the great ship shuddered through her entire length.

Frank and Jack pitched forward with the shock. Lord Hastings opened his eyes. Recovering themselves, the lads lent their arms to Lord Hastings.

"Go below and report!" commanded Lord Hastings to Frank, as he staggered to his feet.

Frank leaped away and was back in a few moments his face grave.

"Shell pierced both boilers, sir," he reported quietly. "We're leaking in a dozen places. Carpenter says we won't float ten minutes."

"Very well," said Lord Hastings. "Man the boats!"

Frank and Jack hurried away with the necessary orders, and then returned to Lord Hastings.

Every man aboard was seen safely over the side. Then Jack turned to Lord Hastings.

"Come, sir," said the lad. "The men are gone. There is no need of our remaining."

Lord Hastings suffered himself to be led away. A moment later they were afloat in one of the *Tiger's* lifeboats, with shells flying all about them.

CHAPTER XXV

ADRIFT

UNMINDFUL of the shells that sang overhead and all about them, Lord Hastings stood up in the little boat and cast a last glance at the British cruiser *Tiger*.

"I seem to have awfully bad luck with my ships," he said. "It's a wonder the admiralty will trust me with one. This makes I don't know how many I have lost. It's a wonder I live to tell the tale."

"You won't live if you don't sit down," said Jack, as a rifle bullet struck the gunwale. "It strikes me that it's hardly sportsmanlike to use rifles on helpless men at sea, but that's what the Austrians are doing."

"They don't want to be troubled with survivors, apparently," said Lord Hastings, but he sat down.

"Pull away from here, quick!" shouted Frank. "The old *Tiger* is about to go down. We don't want to be drawn under with her."

All three seized oars and pulled hard. Rapidly they drew away from the *Tiger*, which was even now taking its last gap.

"There," said Frank, at last, laying down his oars. "Guess we're safe enough now if the Austrians don't pick us off with rifles."

The three turned and surveyed the *Tiger*.

Suddenly the battle cruiser lurched heavily and listed sharply to port. A moment later a great sheet of flame arose and enveloped her.

"Fire reached her magazine, sir," said Frank calmly.

Lord Hastings nodded, but did not take his eyes off the *Tiger*.

There came a second explosion. Slowly the great ship rolled over on her side. A moment later she sank.

"Well," said Lord Hastings, "let's get out of here if we can."

They took to the oars again.

A glance around showed them that there was no possibility of reaching one of the Italian cruisers. These had gone on as the *Tiger* sank. Half a dozen Austrian vessels were now bearing down on them. From these ships, came a stream of rifle bullets. The Austrian sailors were picking off the survivors, adrift at sea. Above, shells from both fleets still passed overhead.

"I have no mind to be slaughtered here in the

open," declared Lord Hastings. "Frank, tie your handkerchief to an oar and raise it. We'll see whether these brutes will respect even the flag of surrender."

Hastily Frank obeyed, and he raised the oar aloft and waved it to and fro.

The oar was knocked from his grasp. A bullet, shattering the handle, had numbed his hand. Jack seized the oar as it fell.

"The cowards!" cried Frank, clasping his numbed right hand with his left. "So they shoot down helpless men, eh?"

"Doesn't surprise you, does it?" asked Jack. "We've known right along they are barbarians. However, I'll see what luck I have."

He raised the oar and waved it vigorously. Lord Hastings, in the meantime, saw that several boat loads of survivors from the *Tiger* were still afloat. The others he could not see. Although he did not know it, these others had been either killed with rifle bullets or their boats had been destroyed under them by Austrian shells. Lord Hastings, however, surmised as much, and he gritted his teeth.

Bullets still flew close to the little boat despite the white flag Jack waved; but suddenly they ceased. Lord Hastings, looking to port, saw two more of the

Tiger's lifeboats struck by shells at almost the same moment. Besides the one that contained the three officers, there was only one more boat still afloat.

Lord Hastings saw two men in this boat fling up their hands suddenly and slide down in the bottom. They had been shot by Austrian sharpshooters.

"They are butchers, that's all," said Lord Hastings, between his clenched teeth.

And at that moment a shell struck the other boat and it disappeared. The survivors of the *Tiger* now numbered but three — Lord Hastings, Frank and Jack.

No more bullets fell near the little craft in which they floated. Soon a small boat put off over the side of the nearest Austrian ship and made for them.

"Revolvers ready, boys," said Lord Hastings. "They may be coming to take us aboard and they may be coming to make an end of us. We won't go down without a fight."

So half a dozen leveled revolvers met the Austrian boat as it drew near.

"Put down those guns!" cried a voice in German. "You are our prisoners. We mean you no harm."

"Guess it's all right, boys," said Lord Hastings. "They will hardly kill us now. Drop the guns."

Frank and Jack obeyed orders, though not without inward protests. It would have given them great satisfaction, in view of the manner in which the Austrians had fired on the open boats, to have emptied the contents of their revolvers among the Austrians.

The Austrian craft ran alongside.

"Climb in here," said a harsh voice.

The three castaways obeyed.

The little craft put off for the Austrian cruiser.

Five minutes later the three were aboard the Austrian ship, where they were greeted by the commander, Captain Dunloff.

"Officers, eh?" said the captain, eyeing their uniforms. "So much the better. Admiral Sparksburg will wish to question you. Get forward."

"Hardly the proper way to greet your prisoners, Captain," said Lord Hastings in German.

The Austrian commander made no reply, but pointed forward. Lord Hastings, Frank and Jack followed his finger. Half a dozen Austrian sailors surrounded them and they were led away.

Locked up in a small unfurnished cabin below, they were left to themselves.

"This is a great crew," said Frank. "Barbarians is no name for them."

"They have been led on by the Germans," said Lord Hastings quietly. "The Austrian, ordinarily, is rather a decent fellow. I will wager that Admiral Sparksburg is a German. I shall have a few words to say to him, if we are permitted to see him."

Lord Hastings was to have this opportunity much sooner than he expected.

The three British officers had not been in their prison more than an hour when an officer unlocked the door and ordered them to follow him. On deck, they found a man in conversation with Captain Dunloff on the bridge.

"Admiral Sparksburg, or I miss my guess," said Lord Hastings in a low voice; "and you can see that he is a German."

Lord Hastings was right, it developed. The admiral motioned the prisoners and Captain Dunloff below to the commander's cabin. There, seating himself at the captain's desk, he questioned Lord Hastings.

"Who are you?" he demanded briefly.

"Commander Hastings, *H. M. S. Tiger*," replied Lord Hastings.

"British, eh?"

"Of course."

"What are you doing in the Adriatic?"

"Sinking a few Austrian ships," replied Lord Hastings briefly.

The German flushed.

"You'd best keep a civil tongue in your head," he said sternly. "You will find that I am not to be trifled with."

Lord Hastings said nothing.

"Now," said Admiral Sparksburg, "you will perhaps answer a few of my questions. What is the strength of the British in the Adriatic?"

Lord Hastings smiled slightly as he replied:

"Surely you don't expect me to answer that question, sir."

"I wouldn't ask it if I didn't expect an answer," said the German admiral curtly.

"I decline to answer," said Lord Hastings quietly.

"You will find that we have ways of producing answers, if necessary," said Admiral Sparksburg.

"I wouldn't doubt that you would try," replied Lord Hastings. "Any race of men who will shoot down helpless men in open boats will stop at no kind of barbarity."

Admiral Sparksburg jumped to his feet.

"Silence!" he thundered.

Again Lord Hastings smiled.

"The shoe fits, doesn't it?" he asked quietly. "You may be sure, that when I am back in England this matter shall be called to the attention of the world. You are cowards, barbarians and fools to boot. No wonder the civilized world is arrayed against you."

Admiral Sparksburg's face was a dull purple.

"How dare you talk to me like that?" he cried. "You, a mere commander of a British battle cruiser? What weight will your word have against mine? I am a distant relative of the German emperor."

"Is that so?" asked Lord Hastings. "Why, I didn't know that. Fact is, although I am but a mere commander of a British battle cruiser, I am not such a distant relative of King George. You'll find that my word has considerable weight. Also, you will mistreat me, or my officers here, at your peril. The German emperor has not lost his head, as you have, and I may tell you that before the war, your emperor was pleased to count me among his friends. 'A word to the wise is sufficient,' sir."

Admiral Sparksburg's face was livid with anger.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE KAISER

THE German admiral took a step forward and shot a finger under Lord Hastings' nose.

"You lie!" he cried.

"Crack!"

Lord Hastings' right fist shot out with tremendous force. Struck on the bridge of the nose, Admiral Sparksburg staggered back, blood streaming from the injured member.

Immediately Captain Dunloff produced a pair of revolvers, with which he covered Lord Hastings and his two officers.

"One move and you are dead men!" he cried.

Lord Hastings' hands dropped to his side.

"I allow no man to call me a liar," he said quietly.

Admiral Sparksburg removed a handkerchief from his nose long enough to gasp.

"Summon a file of sailors! He shall be shot at once!"

"Your excellency!" exclaimed Commander Dunloff. "Surely you will not go that far!"

"Silence!" thundered Admiral Sparksburg.
"Obey my order!"

Captain Dunloff swung on his heel and left the cabin. Neither Lord Hastings, Frank nor Jack uttered a word.

But before Captain Dunloff returned with a squad of sailors, the anger of the German admiral had subsided somewhat. He waved the sailors away.

"On second thought," he explained, "I have changed my mind. Shooting would be too easy a death for this man. I am going ashore when we get back to Trieste. Have these three men well guarded until then."

He stamped angrily from the cabin.

"Poor admiral is somewhat peeved," said Jack, with a smile.

"Silence there!" cried Captain Dunloff. "You should be thankful that you were not all executed at once. However, I have no doubt that you will wish before long that you had been. While I don't know the admiral's plans, I expect that your cases will be put before the kaiser."

"That will take time," said Lord Hastings.
"Getting word to Germany and back is not a question of hours."

"You will find it is a question of hours now,"

said Captain Dunloff. "As it happens, the kaiser is in Trieste."

"So?" exclaimed Lord Hastings. "In Germany's condition, I had no idea he would venture so far away. The country may collapse in his absence. Would it be asking too much of you to explain why he is here?"

"I don't suppose it will make any difference," replied Captain Dunloff. "He is here on a tour of inspection with the Austrian emperor."

"I see," said Lord Hastings. "I wonder if I shall have the opportunity to pay my respects to his majesty?"

"Is it true," asked Captain Dunloff, "that the emperor is a friend of yours?"

"It is true that he once considered me a friend," replied Lord Hastings, "but this war has strained many friendships."

"I hope," said Captain Dunloff hastily, "that if you see the emperor you will tell him I had no hand in this proceeding. I am sorry you have been discourteously treated, sir."

"Thanks," said Lord Hastings, in no wise affected by the Austrian's sudden change of front. "Apparently," he thought, "the Austrians hold the kaiser in great awe."

"I shall be forced," said the Austrian commander, "to return you to your prison. Those are my orders, sir. But I shall see that you are made comfortable as long as you are my prisoners."

"Thank you, sir," said Lord Hastings again.

This time the three friends were led to a more comfortable cabin, where food and drink was set before them. They made themselves as comfortable as possible. After they had dined, Lord Hastings announced that he felt like a nap and stretched himself out in one of the bunks. Jack and Frank followed suit in another.

How long they slept they did not know, but all were aroused by the opening of the door. Captain Dunloff, backed by a squad of sailors, stood in the doorway.

"I must ask you to follow me," he said.

The three British officers asked no questions. They followed Captain Dunloff to his cabin. There they found Admiral Sparksburg and a group of other officers.

"We are now at Trieste," said Admiral Sparksburg, "and we are going ashore; and by the time I am done with you, I am sure that you will wish you had died in the open sea."

Lord Hastings vouchsafed no reply to this im-

plied threat, and he motioned Jack and Frank to silence.

Half an hour later the three British officers found themselves between a squad of men rapidly marching along the pier. Admiral Sparksburg and his officers came behind them.

After an hour's walk they were escorted up the steps of a large building, plainly a private home, and then into what appeared to be the parlor. The windows, Lord Hastings noticed, were heavily barred. The walls of the house were thick.

"A first rate prison," Lord Hastings muttered to himself. "I'll wager you couldn't hear a man yell in here from without."

All the officers, save Admiral Sparksburg and three men with captains' straps, left the room.

"You will pay my respects to his majesty," Admiral Sparksburg called, "and say I will be with him as soon as I have disposed of a certain piece of business."

When the others had gone, he turned to Lord Hastings, an evil smile on his face.

"We have here," he said, "none of my soft hearted Austrian friends. We are all Germans; and now I must ask you for an answer to the question I asked not so long ago."

"My answer is the same now as it was then," said Lord Hastings. "I decline to speak."

"So? Well, perhaps we can induce you to open that mouth of yours. Captain Lemberg, the whip!"

Lord Hastings' face flushed, but he made no move.

The man addressed as Captain Lemberg stepped forward, a long, stout whip in his hand.

"You shall see," said Admiral Sparksburg, "how we treat prisoners who do not talk when we tell them to."

"I know already how you treat them," said Lord Hastings. "Nevertheless you may be sure that you are wasting both time and energy on me. You cannot force me to speak."

"Can't I? We'll see. Strip him, men."

Two of the officers laid hold of Lord Hastings and quickly laid bare his back. Lord Hastings did not resist, and he motioned Jack and Frank to silence.

"Now, Lemberg," said Admiral Sparksburg, "do your duty."

Captain Lemberg, with an evil smile on his face, raised the whip high above his head.

Frank and Jack, feeling they could stand the

suspense no longer, were about to hurl themselves forward, when an interruption came from an unexpected source.

The door to the room opened and a man stepped inside. He took in the situation at a glance, and stepped quickly forward.

"What is going on here?" he demanded in a sharp voice.

Admiral Sparksburg and Captain Lemberg and all the rest fell upon one knee. For the moment the prisoners were forgotten.

"Your majesty," murmured the Germans.

For the man who had thus unceremoniously entered the room was none other than Wilhelm II, emperor of Germany.

"Stand up," said the kaiser sharply, and the men arose. "What are you doing here?" he continued addressing Admiral Sparksburg.

"I have asked these British officers for certain information, sire," said Admiral Sparksburg, "and they have refused to divulge it."

"And so you thought to gain it by the lash," said the kaiser sarcastically. "You fool, don't you know these English better than that? They will die before they speak. Besides, I will have none of this."

"But this man," said the admiral, indicating Lord Hastings, "struck me, your majesty."

"Did he?" asked the kaiser; "why?"

"Because I told him he lied, sire."

"And did you?" demanded the kaiser.

"Did I what, your majesty?"

"Did you lie, sir?"

"No, sire, I did not. This man told me that before the war you had been pleased to account him a friend. It was then that I told him he lied, sire."

"So he said I was a friend, eh?" muttered the kaiser. "I must have a look at his face."

He approached Jack first and then Frank, but there was no sign of recognition in his eyes. Then he laid a hand on Lord Hastings' shoulder and swung him about so the two stood face to face.

The German emperor uttered a cry of pure amazement.

"Lord Hastings!" he cried.

The two men, erstwhile friends, but enemies now for almost four years, grasped hands.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE KAISER TAKES A HAND

"LORD HASTINGS!" cried the kaiser again.

He held Lord Hastings off at arms' length, a hand upon each shoulder.

"I am glad to see you again, my friend," said the German emperor.

Suddenly the emperor, who seemed for the moment to have forgotten that there were others in the room, turned. His eyes fell upon Admiral Sparksburg, but he said nothing.

He stepped across the room and with his own hands picked up Lord Hastings' shirt, coat and other clothing. These he held out to Lord Hastings.

"After you have put these on, your lordship," he said quietly, "we shall have a little talk."

Frank and Jack were no less dumbfounded by these strange proceedings than were Admiral Sparksburg and the other German officers. They had known, of course, that before the war, their

commander had been on intimate terms with the ruling houses in most of the European countries, but they had not known how good friends Lord Hastings and the German kaiser had been.

But the friendship of these two men had been well known in the European capitals before the war. Lord Hastings more than once had been the guest of the German emperor in Potsdam, and the kaiser twice had taken long cruises on Lord Hastings' yacht. A friendship like this, though strained often by such events as had put the world in turmoil, does not usually break.

The kaiser waited quietly while Lord Hastings dressed.

"First, your majesty," said Lord Hastings, "I would present to you my two young officers, who, though I do say it, have done much to cripple your fleet, sire."

"A strange reason for presenting them to me, Lord Hastings," said the kaiser, with a smile, "but these are strange times. If they are friends of yours I am glad to see them, though, as you know, I was never overly fond of the English."

Frank and Jack bowed in acknowledgment of the introduction.

"Now," said the kaiser, "we have more serious

matters before us. I shall attend to them personally."

He crossed the room to where Admiral Sparksburg and the three other German officers stood. To the latter he said:

"You, of course, were acting under orders, so perhaps are not to blame. Leave the room."

The officers did not hesitate. With low bows they backed out the door. The kaiser wheeled upon Admiral Sparksburg.

"Come here, sir!" he said sharply.

Admiral Sparksburg stepped to the center of the room. His face was ashen.

"You," said the kaiser sternly, "are a coward. How you chance to be an admiral in the imperial navy I don't know, but I personally guarantee that you will be reduced in rank within twenty-four hours. You will stand where you are, sir, until my friend Lord Hastings has given an account of what has transpired."

"I have nothing to say concerning his treatment of me, your majesty," said Lord Hastings, putting the matter aside with a sweep of his hand, "but I can call to your majesty's attention certain things that he has done that I know you know naught of."

"Proceed," said the kaiser.

"When my cruiser the *Tiger* was sunk," said Lord Hastings, "my men took to the lifeboats. The Austrian ships, under command of this man here, shelled the open boats in the sea."

The kaiser stepped backward.

"Impossible, Hastings!" he exclaimed.

"It is the truth, your majesty," said Lord Hastings. "Not only that, but the men in the boats were shot down with rifles. My second officer here, who was waving a white flag upon an oar, had the oar knocked from his hand by a rifle bullet. This, your majesty, under command of this man here," and Lord Hastings indicated Admiral Sparksburg.

"I have heard of these things before," muttered the German emperor, "but until now I have had no proof. So it is true, eh?"

Admiral Sparksburg, who had stood silent and shaking until now, spoke up suddenly.

"It is not true, your majesty!" he exclaimed.

"Silence!" thundered the kaiser in a voice that caused Admiral Sparksburg to tremble with fear. "Silence, sir! Some time since you called my friend Lord Hastings a liar. Now I return the compliment. You are a liar, sir, and a coward and a cur to boot."

Admiral Sparksburg made no reply to this charge; simply hung his head and trembled.

Emperor Wilhelm stepped to the door and raised his voice. A moment later the room was filled with German officers.

"Before you," said the kaiser to members of his staff, "you see an admiral in the German navy. He has been a friend to many of you. Now, I find that he is a murderer, unfit to wear the German uniform.

"Let me give warning to all of you. From time to time I have heard of certain cruelties and barbarous acts by my soldiers. Until now I have had no proof. But I've proof enough now, and I want you to understand that the next one of you who is found guilty of similar actions I shall treat as I do this man now."

The kaiser stepped forward until he faced Admiral Sparksburg. He extended a hand.

"Your sword, sir!" he said clearly.

Admiral Sparksburg started back.

"Your majesty—" he began.

"Your sword," said the kaiser again.

Slowly Admiral Sparksburg unloosened his belt. He took his sword and passed it to his emperor. Quickly the kaiser unsheathed the sword, tossed the

belt away and broke the admiral's sword across his knee.

Again Admiral Sparksburg started back.

"Stand still, sir," said the kaiser. "I am not through with you yet."

From the man's shoulders, the German emperor tore his admiral's straps. Off came the gold braid and the gold buttons. A moment later the late Admiral Sparksburg was garbed simply in a uniform of blue. There was nothing to indicate his rank.

"You are under arrest, sir," said the kaiser. "Colonel von Myers, see that he is well guarded."

The degradation of Admiral Sparksburg was complete. As he passed from the room under guard, his head hung, but he raised it a moment to cast a malevolent look at Lord Hastings, who had stood quietly by during the proceedings. And he caught the kaiser's last words as he passed through the door:

"A good riddance," said the German emperor. "Now," he continued to the others, "you will kindly leave me alone with my friends here."

"But your majesty," said one of his staff, "they are enemies and may do you harm."

"These men will do me no harm," said the kaiser quietly. "Go!"

The group of officers left the room protestingly, but they took up their stand directly outside.

"I am sorry, my lord," said the kaiser, "that you have fallen into our hands. I must of course detain you until after the war. You may make sure that you shall be well treated. Will you give me your paroles not to attempt to escape?"

Lord Hastings shook his head.

"I am sorry, but we cannot do that, your majesty," he said. "We shall be glad to give our paroles until such time as we leave you, but after that we will risk anything to escape."

Kaiser Wilhelm smiled.

"Well, I can't blame you for that, my lord," he said. "But now tell me something of England. How is our good cousin George bearing up under this strain?"

"As well as could be expected, your majesty," was Lord Hastings' reply. "To tell the truth, if I may say it, you have aged considerably since I saw you in Potsdam."

"It's true enough," said the kaiser, "but what can you expect, my lord? This war is enough to make a man grow old before his time."

"And there is no peace in sight," said Lord Hastings with a sigh.

"No," replied the kaiser, "and with America come to your aid, it seems likely that the struggle will be greatly prolonged. But come, we must not talk about the war, for we shall not agree? What of Lady Hastings?"

"She could not be better, your majesty; and the empress?"

"Not so well," said the kaiser. "These women, your lordship, don't seem to bear up very well under this war. They are anxious for peace."

"And still they suffer as much if not more than the men," said Lord Hastings quietly.

"Perhaps," said the kaiser. "But at any rate, the time has not come when women shall dictate the policy of Germany."

"It might be a good job if it had," muttered Frank to himself, but he said nothing aloud.

The audience with the kaiser was prolonged for perhaps an hour. Then the kaiser said:

"I'm a busy man, my lord, so I trust you will excuse me now. I am sorry you did not see fit to give your parole. I must now have you placed under guard."

An hour later the three friends were confined in an Austrian prison.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ESCAPE

It was a comfortable prison in which Lord Hastings and his two young officers found themselves. It was not one of the old time prisons with which Trieste was filled, but rather an improvised jail. An old residence had been transformed into a place to keep prisoners of war.

The building was situated not far from the water front — rather a precarious place to keep prisoners, for the building was exposed to possible shell fire from an attacking fleet. It was apparent, however, that the Austrians had not given this matter much consideration. Plainly it was their view that prisoners might as well be exposed to danger as Austrian troops themselves.

The room in which the three British officers found themselves was comfortably furnished. It was exceptionally large and contained three beds, half a dozen chairs and a large table in the center. This served at once for a reading table and a place upon which to eat.

The three explored the room shortly after they had been incarcerated there. The windows appeared to be heavily barred. The door was of stout oak and the lock sound and firm.

"Impossible to force that lock," said Lord Hastings, after examining it carefully.

"Looks that way, sir," Jack agreed.

The lad approached first one and then the other of the three windows and tested the bars. Suddenly he gave an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Frank.

With Lord Hastings he hurried to Jack's side.

"Matter is," exclaimed Jack jubilantly, "is that I believe I can yank out a couple of these bars without much difficulty."

"Do you think so, Jack?" exclaimed Frank eagerly.

"Sure," was the reply. "One of them is so loose that it won't take much effort. But there is no use doing it in broad daylight."

"Right you are," said Lord Hastings. "But it's a long drop to the ground, and it is likely that there are guards all around."

"Can't help that, sir," said Jack. "It's worth taking a chance when the time comes. We don't want to be tied up here for the next few years. Be-

sides, it will be easy enough getting to the ground."

"How?" asked Lord Hastings.

"Well, we've plenty of bed clothing," said Jack.

"They will make a pretty fair rope, sir."

"You bet," agreed Frank. "I've had some success that way before, and it seems to me it can be done again."

"We'll think it over," said Lord Hastings. "Wait, I've an idea. We can get a pretty view from here. We'll stand watch and ascertain at what hours the guards make their rounds. Then, if we decide to go out this way, we can time our movements so as to escape them."

"A good idea, by Jove!" said Frank. "I'll watch a while, sir."

Frank took up his position, while the others returned to the table, picked up books and began to read.

Jack relieved Frank at the end of two hours and at that time it was dark. Two hours later Lord Hastings relieved Jack.

This method was continued all through the night at two hour intervals. When morning came, the three compared notes and found that they had learned much.

Apparently there was but one man at a time on

guard below their window. Apparently, also, he had other parts of the prison to guard. He passed under the window only once an hour. The watches, it had been found, were changed every four hours.

"So, with quick work," said Jack, "we will always have at least fifty minutes from the time the guard passes under the window."

"Trouble is," said Lord Hastings, "that we don't know where he goes after he passes under the window."

"Well, he goes one way, sir," said Frank. "It's up to us to go the other if we get to the ground."

"Good reasoning there," said Jack with a smile. "We'll adopt that plan, Frank."

"There is also another trouble," said Lord Hastings.

"And that, sir?"

"We don't have any weapons."

"We'll have to make an effort to get some after we get out," said Frank. "That shouldn't be such a hard job. There are three of us, you know. I've a plan. After we get down, we'll lie in wait at the corner of the house until the guard appears. Then we'll nail him and his weapons. There are three of us. He will be caught off his guard and we won't give him time to cry out."

"Trouble is we don't want to be bothered with a rifle," said Jack; "what we want are revolvers."

"Well, he'll have a revolver or so on him, most likely," said Lord Hastings. "Besides, rifles are not to be sneezed at, you know."

"Guess you're right, sir," agreed Jack. "But after we get away from here, then what?"

"We won't cross any bridges until we come to them," said Lord Hastings with a smile. "My plan, though, would be to make a dash for the water-front, try and commandeer a boat and put to sea. If we could get hold of a real speedy launch and get an hour's start we might run the blockade, all right."

"It's worth trying, at all events," said Jack. "Well, sir, when shall we make the attempt?"

"The sooner the better," said Frank.

"I agree with Frank," said Lord Hastings. "If we are going to try it, we might as well do so to-night. Besides, the Austrians are likely to take a notion to move our prison, and we might not be so fortunate to have a loosened bar in our next cell."

"Right, sir," said Frank.

"To-night it is, then," said Jack. "About what time, sir? Midnight?"

"Midnight will do as well as any other hour," said Lord Hastings.

"All right," said Jack. "Then all that remains for us to do is to get ready. Now, it would not be wise to improvise our rope from the bedclothes, sir, because we may have callers during the day. I should say that job could be easily done in two hours. We'll start rope-making at 10 o'clock."

"Suit yourself," said Lord Hastings with a smile.

The day passed slowly. Frank was impatient for the hour for action, but nevertheless, upon Lord Hastings' advice, he lay down in the afternoon for several hours and slept. Jack and Lord Hastings did likewise.

Food was brought them at 6 o'clock and the value of Jack's idea in not touching the bed clothing earlier was seen. The man who brought the food — an Austrian officer — entered the room and remained until they had cleaned what was before them. Then he took the empty dishes and withdrew.

"Well, I feel a bit better after that meal," said Jack. "Think it gave me strength to remove a couple of bars."

"Are you sure you can do it, Jack?" asked Frank anxiously. "To tell the truth, I believe you'd better get that bar out before we tear up these bedclothes. We'll still need bedding, you know, if that bar refuses to budge."

"That's so," said Jack. "Guess I had better tackle that bar. What time is it?"

"Five minutes after eight," said Frank after glancing at his watch.

"Good," said Jack. "The guard usually passes about a quarter after. I'll keep an eye out for him and as soon as he has passed I'll tackle that bar."

He rose and approached the window. Soon his patience was rewarded, for he saw the guard pass and disappear around the corner of the building.

The window, of course, was open for the weather was warm. Lord Hastings extinguished the lights in the room and Jack laid hold of the bar.

Once, twice, three times he wrenched and the bar came away in his hands. Jack gave a low cry of triumph.

"Told you I could do it," he exclaimed.

The three now returned to the table and sat down in the darkness, for they were afraid to show a light. Light in the room might expose the missing bar without, should the guard chance to gaze upwards.

At last 10 o'clock came, and the three set to removing the bed clothes and fashioning a rope. This was the matter only of minutes.

"Now for something to tie it to," said Frank.

"Guess the bed will do," said Jack.

The three laid hold of the bed and moved it close to the window. Jack tied one end of the improvised rope securely to one of the brass legs.

"Now," he said, "all we've got to do is drop this rope out the window and climb down."

"Better let me go first," said Lord Hastings. "I'm not as active as you fellows and I may need a little help from above."

"Very well, sir," said Jack.

"Well, I wish midnight would hurry up and get around," declared Frank.

"Don't fret," said Jack. "It will be here soon enough — maybe too soon, for that matter."

Midnight came at last.

"All right," said Jack, who had been at the window watching for the guard to pass. "He's gone. We've fifty minutes to make it, but not one to lose. You first, Lord Hastings."

Jack flung the rope out the window and Lord Hastings clambered to the window sill and descended. Frank followed, then Jack. In five minutes all stood safely upon the ground.

CHAPTER XXIX

LORD HASTINGS IN ACTION

"It's going to be a long wait for that guard to come back," whispered Frank. "Maybe we'd better go without waiting for him."

Lord Hastings nodded in the darkness.

"Right," he said. "We're out. It is foolish to remain here. We'll head for the water front. Follow me."

Lord Hastings set out in the direction he knew the waterfront to be. Jack and Frank followed him closely.

All were upon the alert, for they knew that to be discovered now, without weapons with which to defend themselves, meant certain capture and perhaps death.

They rounded the corner of the building in the opposite direction from that taken by the guard who had so recently passed and soon they had put a considerable distance between themselves and their late prison.

"If we hadn't left those sheets hanging out the

window, the guard probably wouldn't discover our absence to-night," said Jack in a low voice. "But he'll be back around there again in a minute and then he'll sound the alarm."

"Which means that the quicker we get a boat and afloat the better," said Lord Hastings grimly.

"Exactly," agreed Jack.

"It can't be far to the waterfront," said Frank as they moved along. "We could see the water from the window of our prison, you know."

"It's probably farther than it looked from there," said Lord Hastings, "but with luck, I believe we should reach it before our absence is discovered."

"Trouble is that the water is where they will be likely to look for us first," said Jack.

"Well, we can't help that — Hello!"

Lord Hastings broke off with an exclamation.

Approaching them came two figures — soldiers, as Jack could see by the glare of a street lamp as they passed under it. At that moment the three passed a house which had a small vestibule. Jack reached out and drew his companions into its shelter.

"Here is our chance to get weapons," he said. "We'll jump them as they pass."

The fugitives waited quietly. The footsteps

came closer. The shadows of the soldiers were visible without. Then the men appeared.

Silently the three British officers hurled themselves upon the Austrians. Their blows they aimed perfectly — with such precision that both soldiers toppled to the ground without giving an outcry.

“Search them for guns, quick!” ordered Jack. “I’ll keep an eye out.”

From the person of each man Frank removed two revolvers. Two he kept himself. One each he passed to Jack and Lord Hastings.

“Might be well to change clothes with these fellows,” he said.

“Good idea,” said Jack. “There are only two uniforms but that will help some.”

Frank was about to discard his coat when from the distance from where they had come revolver shots sounded on the night air.

“Never mind, Frank!” cried Jack. “They have discovered our escape. What we need now is speed and not Austrian uniforms. Come on!”

At a swift walk, Jack led the way toward the water front.

They came within sight of the water a few moments later. There, riding easily at anchor, close in shore, were several launches.

"One of them will do us, I guess," said Jack.

"It will have to," was Lord Hastings' reply.

They made their way rapidly but cautiously toward the launches; and as cautiously Jack stepped aboard.

"You look at the engine, Frank," he whispered. "I don't know much about them."

Jack stepped to the tiller, while Frank stooped over the engine. Lord Hastings stood erect in the stern, his eyes upon the shore. He held his revolver ready for instant use, should they be discovered.

He stood thus when a figure, which arose from a dark part of the boat, stepped silently forward, and with a subdued exclamation of hate, threw his arms about Lord Hastings' neck.

Lord Hastings uttered a low cry of alarm. At almost the same instant Frank started the engine.

Jack heard his commander's cry and would have left the tiller to go to his assistance, had not Lord Hastings cried:

"Don't stop now! Here come pursuers. Full speed ahead!"

All this time the British commander was struggling with his unidentified assailant.

The boat started forward with such a lurch that Lord Hastings and his antagonist were almost

hurled into the water. The man who had assaulted Lord Hastings, however, saved them both by releasing the arm he had wrapped around Lord Hastings' neck and seizing the side of the boat.

This gave Lord Hastings an advantage of which he took prompt action. He shoved his revolver squarely into the man's face and commanded:

"Hands up!"

Slowly the man's hands went into the air and Lord Hastings made out that he was dressed in the costume of an Austrian sailor.

"Just a common sailor," Lord Hastings muttered to himself. "I won't have much trouble with him. Get forward!" he commanded.

Slowly the man obeyed, and crawling forward as the launch sped through the water, sat down in the small cabin. Lord Hastings took a seat across from him and then, as the moonlight fell upon his captive's face, Lord Hastings uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Admiral Sparksburg!" he cried.

The former German admiral, for such indeed the prisoner proved to be, eyed Lord Hastings malevolently.

"Yes, it is I," he exclaimed, "though I am no longer an officer in the Imperial navy, thanks to

your meddling. I'll get even with you before this incident is over, if it costs me my life."

"Which means," said Lord Hastings, "that I shall have to keep a close watch on you. Thanks for the warning."

Ashore, as Lord Hastings saw in a quick glance, all was confusion. Shadowy figures rushed hither and thither. The departure of the little launch had been discovered. Austrian soldiers and sailors were manning other craft to pursue the fugitives.

But the British officers had a good start and barring accidents their chances of escape were good.

But the accident happened.

Jack called something to Lord Hastings. The latter for a moment turned his head and lowered his revolver.

In that moment Sparksburg leaped.

The revolver was knocked from Lord Hastings' hand as he was borne backward across the rail of the boat. The German's arms wrapped around his neck. In vain Lord Hastings fought back.

Slowly the German shifted his grip until one hand clutched Lord Hastings by the throat. Lord Hastings struck out ineffectually with his hands, kicked with his feet and attempted to bite. It was no use. The German held him powerless.

As consciousness had all but left him, Lord Hastings determined upon a bold ruse. He allowed his muscles to relax, and as the German then attempted to shift his hands to get even a better grip, Lord Hastings with a sudden movement hurled himself into the sea, carrying his enemy with him.

Neither Jack nor Frank had noticed this struggle so intent had each been upon his work, but the sound of the splash attracted Jack. He looked at the spot where Lord Hastings had been a few moments before. His commander was not there.

Jack took in the situation in an instant. With a cry to Frank to stop the engines, he leaped to the rail, scanned the sea closely, made out the struggling forms in the water and leaped overboard.

Frank, who had stopped the engine at Jack's cry, now leaped from the cockpit. He could not see a soul aboard the little craft.

"Great Scott! What's up now?" he cried in alarm.

A moment later Jack rose to the surface of the water under the rail of the boat and struck out to where he had seen the struggling figures.

Lord Hastings and the German, still locked in each other's embrace, had gone down for the second time when Jack reached the place he had last seen them.

As Jack swam rapidly about, the two heads suddenly emerged again.

Jack was alongside the struggling men with two swift strokes. His right hand shot out with tremendous force and Sparksburg, former German admiral, struck full in the face, sank to rise no more. Jack threw out his left hand and caught Lord Hastings by the collar as he was going under for the last time. Then, swimming with one hand, he struck out for the launch.

Frank, leaning over the side, lent a hand and Lord Hastings was dragged aboard and thrown into the cockpit — there was no time now to try and revive him.

Jack jumped for the tiller. Frank sprang to the engine.

The little boat dashed forward again. Behind, the pursuers had approached so close that it seemed impossible the fleeing launch could escape. As the little vessel leaped forward, there came a volley of rifle shots.

Jack ducked his head involuntarily and threw the tiller to port.

There came a second volley. Bullets whistled close to Jack's head.

CHAPTER XXX

SAFE AT LAST

"LITTLE more speed, there, Frank!" cried Jack.

Frank grinned to himself as he bent over his engine.

"You are getting all the speed this thing will stand," he muttered to himself. "I don't know how fast those other fellows can run, but we've about reached our limit. Guess I'll let her run, and crawl back and have a look."

He suited the action to the word and directly was by Jack's side.

"What's the idea of sitting here and let them do all the shooting?" he asked of Jack. "You've one hand loose. Why not have a shot at 'em?"

"Hadn't thought about it," declared Jack.

He leaned forward and from the bottom of the boat picked up the revolver he had dropped when he jumped in the water after Lord Hastings.

Frank, meantime, had produced two revolvers and was now taking shots at their pursuers.

One of the pursuing craft was seen to wobble and

then apparently the man at the wheel lost control, for it darted off at almost a right-angle.

"Must have nicked somebody," said Frank quietly. "Can't tell, though, and a fellow can't do much shooting here. Guess we'll just have to run and trust to luck. I'll go have a look at Lord Hastings."

He crawled forward.

Lord Hastings already had regained consciousness and was now trying to get to his feet. Frank lent him a hand and Lord Hastings stood, swaying dizzily.

"How do you feel, sir?" asked Frank.

Lord Hastings passed a hand across his forehead.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"Austrian launch, sir," said Frank briefly.

"Jack pulled you out of the sea and the arms of the German admiral at the same time."

"I remember now," said Lord Hastings. "Are we safe?"

"Hardly, sir," was Frank's reply. "Every Austrian and German ship in the harbor is after us. Half a million launches, sir, by the looks of them. Will you go back and have a look?"

"Not yet," said Lord Hastings. "Where's my gun?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Guess it's in the bottom of the boat where I dropped it. I'll have a look."

Lord Hastings found his revolver.

"Now I'll go back and lend Jack a hand," he said.

"Here, sir," said Frank, "you stay here and run this engine. I'll go back with Jack."

"Good idea," agreed Lord Hastings. "Don't believe I could shoot very straight right now, and we are likely to need straight shooting."

Frank turned the engine over to Lord Hastings and crawled back to Jack's side.

"Are we gaining?" he asked.

"Just about holding our own, I should say," said Jack. "It's funny why some of these warships don't pick us up with their searchlights and heave a shell into us."

"I'd thought the same thing," said Frank, nodding. "However, if they don't, we've that much more chance."

But, it seemed, almost in answer to Frank's words, the launch suddenly became the center of a circle of brilliancy. An Austrian warship had "picked them up" with its searchlight.

"Boom!"

It was the sound of a big gun. A shell kicked up the water close to the speeding launch.

"They'll get us before long," said Frank quietly.

"Boom!"

The shell struck closer this time.

Frank hastily crawled back to Lord Hastings.

"Never mind the engine, sir," he said quietly.

"Warships are trying to pot us now. They'll score a hit presently. Come back with us. We'd better all stick together if the boat goes."

Lord Hastings followed Frank's suggestion.

"Boom! Boom."

Two shots sounded in rapid succession.

Frank heard something whizz overhead and ducked instinctively.

But the first shell passed harmlessly overhead; not so the second.

True, it missed the boat, but it struck so close that the water spouted up like a mighty geyser and deluged the boat and overturned it.

Lord Hastings, Frank and Jack were floating helplessly in the sea.

Jack struck out vigorously and laid hold of Lord Hastings.

"All right, sir?" he asked.

"All right," was the reply. "Where's Frank?"

"Here, sir," answered Frank, coming to the surface and shaking the water out of his eyes.

"All right," said Jack. "We're still covered by that searchlight, so if we hope to get out of here alive we'll have to get beyond it. When I say three, dive, swim as far as possible to port under water and then come up. We may elude that light that way."

"All right," said Lord Hastings.

"Count," said Frank.

"One," counted Jack; "two, three!"

Upon the word the three dived.

Frank remained under the water until it seemed that his lungs must burst. Then he struck upwards.

Ten yards away he saw Lord Hastings floating easily in the darkness. Jack he could not see. Frank became alarmed.

"Jack!" he called.

"Here!" came Jack's voice so close that Frank started.

"Great Scott! I didn't see you," ejaculated Frank.

"I just came up," said Jack with a laugh. "Well, now which way?"

"You know as much about it as I do," was Frank's reply.

Lord Hastings now swam up to them.

"We are out of range of the searchlight," he said, "although they may pick us up again. However, I imagine they will think we have been done for and not bother any more about us."

"Maybe so," said Frank, "but if you ask my advice it will be to get as far away from here as possible."

"Guess you're right, Frank," said Jack, "but where shall we get to?"

"Well," said Lord Hastings, "I suppose we can make shore without any trouble."

"Strikes me that would be out of the frying pan into the fire, sir," was Jack's comment.

"Perhaps. But it's out of the question for us to swim to Venice, you know."

"That's true enough," said Lord Hastings. "Then I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll swim south, keeping reasonably close to shore. Then if one of us gives out the others can drag him in."

"All right, sir," said Jack.

They struck out south in the darkness without further words.

For long hours they swam, it seemed to Frank — although it was only minutes. The lad believed that he now had reached the limit of his endurance,

and he even felt that there was nothing sure about his being able to swim as far as the distant shore.

"I can't go much farther, Jack," he gasped.

"Then we'll head for the shore," decided Lord Hastings.

They changed their course abruptly.

But they were not to reach the shore of Austria.

Even as they turned, a searchlight struck them squarely. Jack gave an exclamation of disgust.

"Why didn't we see that ship?" he ejaculated. "Now they'll have us if we're not careful. It's too late to dive for they have undoubtedly seen us. Chances are they will try to pick us off with rifles, or else send a boat after us. Then we'll land back in an Austrian prison."

"We'll try and dodge the boat when it arrives, if they don't shoot us first," said Frank.

Through the darkness now came the splash of oars. This told the three British officers in the water that they had been discovered. The sound of oars came closer.

Jack caught unintelligible sounds from the distance—the sound of oars. So did Frank and Lord Hastings.

Then, suddenly, Frank's strength gave out. With a sudden cry of alarm he sank from sight.

Instantly Lord Hastings and Jack were after him.

When Frank again opened his eyes, he knew by the motion that he was in a small rowboat. He looked up. Dimly he made out the figures of Jack and Lord Hastings seated close to him.

Then the events of the past few hours came back to him.

"Pretty tough," he muttered to himself. "Almost free, and then gobbled up again."

Jack caught the sound of his chum's voice.

"Hello!" he said. "Feeling better, eh, old man?"

"Oh, I feel well enough," said Frank, "but I'd feel a whole lot better if we were going aboard anything but an Austrian ship."

"Now don't you fret," said Jack happily. "We're not going aboard an Austrian ship. This boat is a lifeboat of an Italian cruiser. The men we thought were coming to kill or capture us chanced to be friends."

"Look here," said Frank, "I may be pretty sick and I may not, but don't you try to fool me; because if you do, when I get well I'll punch your head."

"All right," said Jack with a grin, "but you won't

have to do it this time. Here's Lord Hastings, who will vouch for what I say."

Frank would not rest content until Lord Hastings explained that the ship that had picked them up was a small Italian cruiser, which had been conducting a raid single handed and had come upon them after successfully accomplishing a well nigh impossible feat.

Then Frank leaned back in the boat and closed his eyes. And as he lay thus, the little lifeboat, under strong hands, hurried toward the Italian cruiser and safety.

Suddenly Frank sat up.

"I say, Jack!" he called.

"What is it, old man?" asked Jack, bending over his chum.

"I won't have to punch your head, after all, will I?"

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